

Series	Sermon on the Mount
Study	Study 1a
Topic	What Does it Mean to be Blessed
Reference	Matthew 5-7
Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

Welcome to Gamma 15. In this part of our program we will be dealing with Matthew chapter 5, looking at Jesus sermon on kingdom living. As a background, we're looking at Mount Sinai and where Moses was given the Ten Commandments, the Torah, which is basically the basis of the Old Covenant given to the people of Israel. In the New Testament, there is another mountain, Matthew 5,

Matthew 5: 1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

So the scene is of another mountain and this time is Jesus not Moses. He is cast as the second Moses, the new Moses, and now he is giving through to Sermon on Mount the ethic of the new covenant.

Of similarities with Moses here we have Moses and Jesus both have dreams connected to their birth. The slaughter of babies associated with their birth for both of them. Both of them had a narrow escape from disport to return later. Moses from Pharaoh Jesus from Herod. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. There were miracles associated with both their ministries and Moses preach about the promised land and Jesus preached about inheriting the earth.

So Jesus is teaching a new foundational law for the new people of a new covenant, the fulfillment of the old covenant and the fulfillment of Moses.

Let's look at the structure of Matthew. Jesus preaches Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and then he heals in the next two chapters, and for the rest of Matthew, the themes of the kingdom of heaven, kingdom of God, righteousness, persecution, mercy are worked out in the rest of Matthew. Jesus has a radically new vision for kingdom living, a new approach dealing with issues of society, for a new approach for dealing with offenders,

- Instead of retaliating against them, we forgive them
- Against oppressors instead of violence we have peaceful opposition and suffering
- Dealing with money, instead of hoarding it we share it.
- Dealing with corruption, instead of just passing new laws, we have a new societal order where we have to changing of the hearts in terms of leadership
- Instead of just hanging onto power, we are utilizing the gifts of all
- In terms of interpersonal relationships, instead of using people, we are actually supposed to be serving people.

So Jesus's vision of a kingdom living is a new approach. It's radically different for anything the world has ever seen. The chapter begins with the beatitudes. Eight beatitudes, which are for verses 3 to 11.

The key word that we need to understand in order to unlock the whole passage is the word blessed. This is repeated all throughout the entire eight beatitudes. The actual Greek word used here is the word **Makarios**. It is translated either into happy or blessed. Both are inadequate. Let's look at happy. The problem with happy is that it is inadequate because it's transient and it also depends on circumstances. Happiness comes from an old English word called hap, which means luck or chance. That's where you get to word haphazard. Remember the old Perry Como song, happiness comes and happiness goes, where it goes nobody knows, what's in store who can guess, it could be happiness.

What about the old Toyota ad. Wherever we get the Toyota car, everybody's jumping up. Oh, what a feeling because they've got a great car.

What about Makarios describing in the Island of Cyprus in the old days, which is described it to ideally Island. It's got plenty of fish, plenty of resources, the people live very happily and they're happy there. Why? Because this Island has got everything. Not only is happiness depends on circumstances, it seems that happiness can be induced by your own self effort. Look at the options Instituted by Barry Neil Kaufman. He says you can self-generate happiness.

"I can teach people how to be happy. They just have to make a decision not to take on all the crap that the world gives them, and they have to decide to be happy."

So is happiness something that's self-generated or we need somebody to teach us how to be happy. Is that the correct translation of makarios? I think not. The other translation we could use, which is often used, is called blessed. We see this in most Bibles? But the problem is that it means divine, effectual speech, some good that God confers on somebody. It implies a need to fulfill the condition in order to receive this. So it's sort of transactional in nature. You have to do something to get this. So if you look at this beatitude. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, is the good that can come to you, that comes to the person but the condition that must be fulfilled is that they must be poor in spirit. Action must be taken.

So though, for example, those who mourn well, they shall be comforted as the good and a condition that must be fulfilled is that they must mourn.

Now Emperor Julian the Apostate totally misunderstood this and he confiscated Christian's property so that they all might become poor so that they can all enter the kingdom of heaven. What about Creflo dollar, prosperity gospel preacher. He writes,

But the blessing is much more than that. It is actually an empowerment to prosper and have success in every area of our lives

He was talking about blessing as something good,

"No longer do poverty, sickness, addiction, and fear have free course to rule and reign in your life. You no longer have to allow the circumstances of marital discord, rebellious children, or unemployment to dominate your household."

He is promising all these things.

So how do we activate the blessing in our lives? By speaking the Word of God! God's Word is blessed, and when we begin to understand the power of our words and align them with what the Bible says, we turn on the power of the blessing. It will begin working for us, in us, and around us when we use our mouths to declare the Word with boldness, and in faith

He is using the word of God as it were a magical incantation. All you have to do is just declare it, boldness in faith and then it becomes a reality for us. This is not how the word of God should be used. Let's look at the background to makarios, which comes from 'ashre' in Hebrew. The Hebrew understanding ASHRE is the state of happiness, of privilege or fortune or prosperity, fertility and security. It's human flourishing, similar to the understanding of Shalom and it's exclaimed by other people looking at you from the outside. And usually people like this are under God's covenant while obedient to the Torah despite suffering.

Let's look at the Greek understanding. The Greek word is makar, is actually the state of the gods of humans who live a life of happiness like that of the gods - life beyond care or labor or death. Aristotle calls it 'Eudaimonia' which is inner happiness and satisfaction. Now the person who is makarios is basically someone with a good spouse, children, well being, riches on earth and with absolute wisdom.

There is a difference between Makarios and blessed. Makarios is already a description, an internal description of a person who is flourishing, who has divine approval from God and God smiles on already because of who what he is. Blessing is used for something which God or through a medium of a priest confers upon a person may be fulfillment of condition. So makarios is a description of who we already are.

So makarios are wise invitations to the kind of life they will experience flourishing. So let's say, for example, you look at someone who is poor in spirit and mourns, who is weak, who hunger and merciful. You look at a person like that society will look at them and they don't seem like very much because they're poor in spirit, but is actually a state of human flourishing as ultimate state of joy. In God's eyes to be envied, to be emulated, to be fulfilled, which is completely countercultural to what the world looks like. The world prefers to look at somebody like this who is rich and self-sufficient who never apologizes, arrogant, hungry for more money and power, who is vindictive to detractors, merciful to people who like him, who lies incessantly, causes divisions, persecutes children, somebody like that is a world's idea of flourishing because the world worships power.

Take someone from ancient Roman times. Rich, self-sufficient, never apologizes, arrogant, hungry for power, merciless, causes division and chaos within Rome, persecutes everybody through treason trials, it is Caligula, sound familiar.

Take the great American revivalist, Jonathan Edwards, who writes,

The creature is no further happy with his happiness which God makes his ultimate end, than he becomes one with God. The more happiness the greater union: when the happiness is perfect, the union is perfect.

That is what we should be aiming for in order to be Makarios. So the beatitudes are redefinition of who the people of God are in life. So the beatitudes are not a set of conditions to fulfill in order to get blessed. In fact, the beatitudes are description of who or what Christians should be, their character. Beatitudes are a description of kingdom living, verse 3, verse 10 encapsulates all the eight

beatitudes of kingdom living. Let's spend some time in reflection as to what we have learnt as this will bring the word of God into our hearts.

- What was your understanding of blessing before this study?
- How does the understanding of what makarios means and the eight beatitudes change the way you think?
- Why is it that we would rather or most rather be happy rather than to be Makarios?
- How do we change that perspective in our daily lives?

So spend some time thinking about these things and perhaps could use these questions as well when you discuss with your individual groups. Some of you do not have groups please sign up with the list of leaders in this website.