

Lesson 13

All Saints' Day

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:1–12

Matthew organized his Gospel in ways that would help him teach the Christian faith and life. At the outset, as he got into Jesus' ministry, he provided the Sermon on the Mount, a summary of Jesus' teaching about the righteousness of the disciple. Jesus insisted that faith is more than sentimental "believing" or merely intellectual agreement with theological propositions. It involves a relationship with Him that is expressed in a godly lifestyle that honors Him. The classic analysis of faith listed three ingredients: knowledge, assent, and trust. One Christian teacher has quite properly added action. In Christian discipleship, faith always acts on the basis of its trust in God's good will.

Scholars identify five "books" in Matthew, delineated by the phrase "when Jesus finished these sayings." In this first book, the Sermon on the Mount, the ending emphasizes Jesus' unique qualities as the Teacher sent from God: "When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (7:28–29).

The Greek says, "He sat down and He opened His mouth and taught them, saying" This was the classic way of introducing a teacher's setting forth something of vital importance. It says, "Sit up and take notice! This is Jesus' official teaching!" The nature of Jesus' kingdom is immediately evident. Things are turned around, the opposite of what we expect—but consistent with the surprising Good News that God loves sinners and wants us to find new life in Him. The eight statements are called the Beatitudes because each begins with "Blessed."

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called out, "Repent!" The first "Blessed" echoes that call and pertains to those whose poverty of spirit has produced true repentance. *Ptochos*, "poor," is from a verb that describes cringing or crouching like a beggar. Pride is the antithesis of this poverty of spirit and prevents the proud from being blessed.

193. What blessing do the poor in spirit receive?

"Those who mourn" care deeply about the seriousness of their own sins, about sin, injustice and perversion in the world, and about the suffering they and others experience because the world is "out of sync" with its Creator.

194. Just how are such mourners comforted? (See John 14:18–19.)

The "meek" are the gentle, the patient, the humble, those who are strong enough to not assert themselves selfishly at the expense of others. They are the opposite of the "go-getters" who move up even if they have to step on a few others. Note that the promised blessing the meek are to receive is

“the earth”—a blessing for this life, not just for eternal life. But it is generally our human experience that it is the aggressive who grab the earth for themselves.

195. In what sense do God’s meek ones “inherit the earth”? (See Matthew 6:25–34.)

God’s basic, most valuable gift is “righteousness”—being right with Him through Christ and right with others in Christ. “Hunger” and “thirst” are present tense in the Greek, suggesting “keep on hungering and thirsting.”

196. Why must this hungering and thirsting for righteousness be continual?

The Greek word for “satisfied” is very emphatic. It was used for feeding and fattening cattle by giving them all they will eat and more!

197. Where is the Lord’s “filling station” for this blessing?

The first four beatitudes look toward God. The next three look toward other people, citing virtues that disciples of Jesus display in their interaction with others.

198. Of what does “blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” remind you? Consider the opposite. What does one who is unmerciful and unforgiving reveal about how he feels about himself?

199. What is the source and basis of a Christian’s purity of heart? Paul said we will see God “face-to-face” in heaven. How do the pure in heart see God now as part of their daily life experience?

200. Why is it the peacemakers who are called “sons [and daughters] of God”? What limits are there in this matter of peacemaking? (See Romans 12:18; Luke 12:51–53.)

The final blessing involves being persecuted because of righteousness, suffering because of Jesus. Suffering for Christ leads Christians to ____ because it is evidence of a sincere identification with Christ. (See John 15:18–21.)

God’s ways and the world’s ways are usually antithetical. State this by working through the Beatitudes in this way: Jesus said, “Blessed are ____,” but our world says, “Blessed are ____.”

The First Lesson: Revelation 7:2–17

The four angels stand as potential destroyers of the whole earth and as protectors of those God will seal as His own. Then appears the angel with the seal of the living God to be placed on the foreheads of the slaves of our God—in contrast with the mark of the beast on the worldly. The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (p. 1955) explains the total of 144,000: “[This is] not a reference to members of actual Jewish tribes, but symbolic of all the faithful believers on earth. . . . Everywhere in Revelation, 12 is the number associated with the church. Twelve squared is 144. One thousand is 10 cubed, a number for completeness” (see Galatians 3:26–29).

This is followed by John’s vision of the great multitude in white robes standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb, holding palm branches and expressing their praise.

201. Who are the ones in this multitude? How is it that they wear white robes and carry palm branches and are privileged to stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb? Why are they called “a great multitude that no one could number”?

202. To whom do they offer their praise? What do they focus on in their praise? Who then affirms their praise and joins them in praising God?

Those who interpret symbolic visions of this kind literally see “the great tribulation” as a specific time of distress preceding a millennial rule of Jesus on earth. Narrative sections of Scripture, however, never speak of a preliminary, earthly rule, but warn that the end will “come like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2 and others). They do, however, predict a time of great stress for followers of Jesus as the end approaches. The “multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” includes *all* who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”—Christians of every era who have, through much tribulation, entered the kingdom of God (see Acts 14:22).

203. What is it that occupies this multitude from every part of human society?

The words “He who sits on the throne will shelter [literally, ‘spread His tent over’] them with His presence” is a reference to the tabernacle with its *Shekinah*, its cloud of glory that assured the Old Testament people of God’s presence among them. The vision of John makes it clear that full awareness of God’s presence with us will be a hallmark of life in the eternal kingdom. (See Revelation 21:1–3.)

204. How are the blessings of heaven described here in negative terms, as things withheld or removed?

205. What will be the great positive of the heavenly experience?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 John 3:1–3

The opening words of this pericope are an exclamation about the kind of love the Father has given us in Christ, which may be seen in the fact that we are called children of God. John was writing to Christians, most of whom had no status in the eyes of the world. The majority of those who became Christians in the first-century Greek world were slaves. They could be treated badly or disposed of at the will or whim of their masters. The Gospel of God's love in Christ had brought them a wonderful sense of personal worth. God's Son had been made sin for them so they could be made the righteousness of God in Him! But they were feeling pressure. Even in the Church, they were being put down by the "super-spiritual." In the world, they were beginning to feel official persecution for confessing "Jesus is Lord!" and, as a result, rejecting the requirement to worship the emperor as a personification of the divine spirit of Rome.

206. In what ways is it still true today that the world that does not know God does not know the disciples of Jesus as children of God?

207. In what ways may the feeling of being put down or one-upped even by other Christians still be a problem in the life of the Church?

The Bible doesn't give us a lot of details about the eternal life that God promises. Here John wrote, "What we will be ____." His words encourage us to recognize that for now, it is sufficient to know that "we are ____."

208. What assurance is added by John's "when He appears we shall be like Him"?

John then returned to an emphasis of the importance of living out who we are in Christ. We are to purify ourselves just as He is pure.

209. What does John point to as motivating factors in purifying ourselves to become more like Jesus in our daily living?