

Living Right Side Up in an Upside Down World

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Matthew 5:1-11

Every year in September most churches have a Rally Sunday. It reminds me of the back to school week. There is excitement in the air. Summer is almost over, and we are back to continue worshiping and serving our Lord with a renewed energy and a renewed commitment. On Rally Sunday, I will remind you our common goal that brings us together as a church.

"As a Christ-centered Armenian Evangelical Church, Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church exists to proclaim the Good News (gospel) of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through worship, evangelism, service, spiritual nourishment, and fellowship – with a special focus on the spiritual and physical needs of our people. We also focus on the preservation of our Armenian heritage."

My first year's theme was **Get Out of the Boat**. Last year's theme was **Connected with God and Each Other**. Did we reach those goals? No, we will never get there but we will strive together to mature in our walk with the Lord.

This year's main theme is going to be **Living Right Side Up in an Upside Down World**. I have adopted this title from a friend of mine from the Bay Area Pastor Shawn Reese (PBCC).

I would like to introduce the Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Are you surprised by the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7? Maybe you are not surprised but the disciples and the crowds were. Jesus' teachings were truly revolutionary in a system where people trusted that righteousness was achieved; it was result of keeping the law and behaving in a godly manner.

The beatitudes are not things a set of things you do so that you can become a "happy" person. They are not items on a checklist to be accomplished. They are not teachings about behaving properly. No, these teachings are an **invitation to become members in the Kingdom of God**. They start from accepting how much

one needs Jesus as Savior, King, Lord, guide, teacher, healer, comforter, and the king of this new kingdom, the new creation.

The beatitudes are teachings about **seeking first His kingdom** and **His righteousness** and all things will come after that...all things.

Pretend you enter Costco and you find a Yamaha Piano with a price tag of \$9.99 and a new iPhone X priced \$8.99. Then you walk towards the fruit section and you find a small bag of bananas priced \$1500. What is going on? Someone has switched the price tags overnight. Surprised?

I believe by studying the Sermon on the Mount one can find the most precious jewels with new price tags. Remember our main theme: **“living right-side up in an upside down world.”** Wright says: “God is acting in and through Jesus to turn the world upside down... to pour out lavish ‘blessings’ on all who now turn to him and accept the new thing that he is doing.”¹ Those “jewels” make us fortunate, happy, content, satisfied, *Makarios* as Jesus said according to Matthew.

Today I would like to do an introduction to the beatitudes.

1. Important Words: *Makarios* and Righteousness

-*Makarios*, translated as blessed, happy, fortunate, content, congratulations, in sync, right side up. It is a difficult word to translate.

When we say happy we think about something that happens to make us happy. The beatitudes are not about how we feel; they are about God’s view of us, how God sees us. In Armenian we say, “*yeraneli e*”. How fortunate is that person who is in the kingdom of God and is poor in spirit, meek, merciful, a peacemaker...so on. These are statements and teachings by Jesus for the person who is already accepted to Jesus as his/her Lord and Savior, and he/she is in kingdom of God. We don't earn those qualities.

Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea. The Greek called “*he Makaria*” which means the **Happy Isle**. They thought that this island could provide everything one needed to have a content life. “*Makarios* describes that joy which

has its secret within itself.”² Nothing from the outside can touch or destroy this joy. “No one will take your joy from you.” (John 16b:22 ESV)

The second word that occurs twice is Righteousness: # 4 and #8

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied...” (#4)

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (#8)

The first four beatitudes as well as the last four lead us to righteousness.

-Righteousness is a key word in the Sermon on the Mount. **Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness....**

For the Israelites, to become righteous was something one had to do, in other words, do “the right things.” Jesus said:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (5:20).

How one can have more righteousness than the scribes and the Pharisees? No one can. God grants us righteousness by His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus is interested in **relationships**. This means to have the **right** relationship with God, with ourselves, and with the community (the other).

2. Eight But One: Kingdom of God

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”(#1)

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (#8)

It starts with the Kingdom of heaven and ends with it. One has to see that all the beatitudes are a result of **being in** the **kingdom of God**, the kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom of heaven is and not will be, (whereas in the rest of the beatitudes the future tense “will” is used). The kingdom is here with us. The kingdom is...

All eight beatitudes can be read from the perspective of the Kingdom of heaven. So one can read them this way: “Blessed are the meek, for theirs is the kingdom of God; blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the kingdom of God...and so on.” We should not look at the beatitudes as eight separate people each one receiving one of those. No, it is one package; either you have it or you don't. We are in the kingdom of God (heaven) and those characteristics are a result of accepting Christ as your King.

3. There is Continuity

It all starts with being poor in the spirit. The poor in spirit are the ones who have realized they are no one if they are not part of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Greek word for poor means extreme, desperately poor. The poor in spirit are those who say: “I need God, I surrender”. Once you are there, you see your sins and the sins of the world around you and you mourn for them and ask for forgiveness; this leads you to be meek, who are the ones who are hungry to be fed by God, to have a right relationship with God and with others. That leads you to learn to be merciful, because Jesus is merciful. How can you be merciful if your heart is closed? Pure in heart leads you to see more than yourself in life. You become a peacemaker, which will lead you to be in trouble. In the end, people **will persecute you** for obeying God and becoming his child. Someone changed the price tags, and the world does not agree with the new prices...

4. Because of Jesus

We cannot create those characteristics. They belong to Jesus. They are not a result of self-effort; they are gifts of the grace, like the Fruit of the Spirit. You cannot buy them and earn them. Once you are a disciple of Christ, you will receive the beatitudes, because you received Jesus. The key is in the verse.

Blessed are the poor in spirit **FOR (BECAUSE and not THEREFORE) is the kingdom of heaven**. If one is not inside the kingdom those beatitudes are meaningless. In fact, they are ridiculous. Remember what Wright said: “God is acting in and through Jesus to turn the world upside down... to pour out lavish ‘blessings’ on all

who now turn to him and accept the new thing that he is doing.” Or as my friend said: **“living right-side up in an upside down world.”**

E. Stanley Jones, a 20th century missionary to India said in his book “Christ of the Mount”: “The Sermon on the Mount seems dangerous. It challenges the whole underlying conception on which modern society is built. It would replace it by a new conception, animate it with a new motive, and turn it toward a new goal.” ¹

5. What is my role?

If this is Jesus’ work in our lives, so what is our role?

I ask you to always come to church hungry, empty, poor in spirit. Please come to Jesus in poor spirit every day. He has his part and we cannot be passive. Work out on your salvation, Paul says. Yes, entering the kingdom is God’s gift of grace; no one can earn it. But once you are in it, God will help you and mold you. Christ will teach you to live right side up in upside down world. God will help you open your eyes to see things in a different way. God will open your eyes to continually repent and believe in HIM when it does not make sense. God will open your eyes to be fed daily by HIS BREAD. Oh no, we are not passive, we are very active...Just remember your role. God is the Potter you are the clay.

Application:

A friend of mine on Facebook wrote: “It took me 9.5 years to complete undergraduate studies and obtain a bachelors degree. The process involved many surprises, much heartache and much more effort than it ought to have. I’m Blessed because “my trials grounded my faith in ways that prosperity and abundance never could.” I’ve come out stronger, more hopeful, wiser, and nearer to my God than I would have otherwise. This blessing I wouldn’t trade for anything...”

Aren’t you surprised? **“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished (surprised) at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”**(Matthew 7:28-29)

The word *astonished* is a strong word. The Greek word means “to strike out, expel by a blow, drive out or away, to be struck with amazement, astonished, amazed..”³ They were driven out by their senses, they were shocked.

Jesus can do this in our lives. It is a good shock.

Someone changed the price tag in the “world market.”

Jesus changed my life priorities. He blessed me...

1 N.T. Wright, *Matthew For Everyone*, p 37

2 William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Matthew*, p 89

3 https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/241779.E_St Stanley_Jones