**Matthew 5a – 18 May 2025**  
**Reading: Matthew 5:1–12**

**Beloved in Christ**,  
How should we approach this passage of Scripture?  
So much has already been written and said about it.

Last week we looked at the background of this sermon of Jesus, and we explained what it meant when God met people on a mountain.

Let me briefly repeat the key ideas:  
When God meets His people on a mountain, He reveals something about Himself, especially His glory. He strengthens His relationship with His people. He emphasizes His role as Judge. And every time, there is a strong expectation of obedience.

The Sermon on the Mount is very carefully structured.  
It is not just a collection of random thoughts from Jesus.  
It also seems that the whole sermon was preached in one sitting.  
There wasn’t time for a detailed explanation of each part and every word—something we are now trying to do over the coming weeks.

Jesus preached this sermon first and foremost for His disciples, with the expectation that they would think deeply about His words and begin to apply them in their lives—just like with all His other teachings.  
But the large crowd gathered there with them were also included.

The sermon begins with the so-called Beatitudes—the “Blessed are…” sayings.  
But how should we understand this list of sayings?

Each of these blessings can be traced to something similar in the Psalms or the Prophets.  
But Jesus gives each one a unique flavour.  
In fact, the way He puts them almost sounds strange—these don’t seem like blessings at all!

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the unimportant, those who hunger and thirst.  
The next group, from verse 7, perhaps sounds more like blessings:  
Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers—people who show a beautiful attitude or character.  
But then, at the end, we again find blessing linked with suffering: persecution, insults, rejection.

The fact that Jesus begins His sermon in such an unusual way should grab our attention.  
There may not be thunder and lightning or trumpets like at Mount Sinai, but the way He speaks reminds us that this, too, is a divine mountain encounter.

This sermon fits beautifully into the broader theme of Jesus’ ministry.  
We saw it already in Matthew 4:24:

“He went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”  
Now, Jesus speaks about the kingdom of heaven.  
He doesn’t only bring physical healing—He addresses our spiritual poverty as well.

The first word from Jesus’ mouth is Makarioi!  
In the 1983 Afrikaans Bible, it is translated “Geseënd”; the 1953 version has “Salig”; the Dutch translation uses “welgeluksalig,” which is probably closest.  
Even though makarioi definitely relates to blessing, the sense in which Jesus uses it here is closer to **a joyful congratulations**.

You would use this word to congratulate someone for something wonderful that has happened.  
It’s an exclamation: “Makarioi! Congratulations! Well done!”

This makes Jesus’ combinations even more surprising:

* Congratulations, you are poor in spirit.
* Congratulations, you are mourning.
* Congratulations, you are being persecuted.

Why is this important?

Because it tells us we must think carefully before we simply apply these sayings like a to-do list.  
Could these be traits that believers should strive for? Probably yes—especially since many are found elsewhere in Scripture. And they certainly fit a godly life.

Let’s begin by examining the first few beatitudes:

Each follows a rhythm:

1. A declaration of blessing
2. A description of the kind of person being blessed
3. A reason or result for the blessing

**First Beatitude: The poor in spirit.**  
The Greek word used here for “poor” refers not to someone just getting by, but to a beggar—someone living below the breadline, someone who knows hunger.

To be poor in spirit means to recognize that your spirit is empty—you cannot help yourself.  
You know your soul is starving, and only God can fill you.

In **Revelation 3:17**, Jesus warns the church in Laodicea:

“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”

But of the church in **Smyrna**, He says:

“I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!” (Revelation 2:9)

The promise to those who are poor in spirit is that theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
They may be poor in this world, but they stand first in line to receive the riches of God's Kingdom.

**Second Beatitude: Those who mourn.**  
Mourning is never easy. The Greek word here refers to deep grief, often about death—but also about suffering, injustice, broken relationships, and spiritual emptiness.

To mourn is to feel the weight of a broken world—nothing in this world is enough to take that grief away.  
We mourn because sin brings death into our lives.  
That kind of grief is fitting for a child of God.

And here is the promise: They will be comforted.  
It’s a comfort that fills the gaps of unmet needs, that gives hope for life. But above all, it's the comfort of **God’s presence**.

Listen to Revelation 21:3–4:

“God’s dwelling is now with His people… He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”

So yes, we can see these sayings as goals for the Christian life.  
We are called to be meek and humble—not putting ourselves first.  
Ephesians 5:21 reminds us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In Jesus’ Kingdom, it’s not the strong and mighty who inherit the earth—it’s the humble, the overlooked, the seemingly insignificant.

We must **hunger and thirst** for righteousness—for a restored relationship with God. Only in that relationship are we truly satisfied.

We must show **mercy**, be **pure in heart**, and become **peacemakers**.  
These are all things Jesus Himself demonstrated, while proclaiming that the Kingdom of heaven had come near.

And the promises are beautiful:

* The merciful will receive mercy.
* The pure in heart will see God.
* The peacemakers will be called children of God.

But then we come to the final two blessings that sound strange again:

* Congratulations, you are persecuted.
* Congratulations, people insult you because of Me!

Can we really strive for these in the same way?  
These are harder to see as goals—but they do happen to God’s people.

Let me take you back to the mountain.  
How do we explain these as Jesus’ opening words in this mountain sermon?

Would you and I have stayed seated after hearing the first three blessings?  
Perhaps.  
But what about the last two—persecution and insults?  
Who needs more trouble in their lives?  
The Romans already hate us, the Jewish leaders persecute us, we are hungry, grieving, mocked as ignorant and unworthy.  
Who needs a sermon like this?

**Why did the people stay?**  
What was it in Jesus’ words that held them there?

I want to share with you the best explanation I’ve ever heard:  
What if this was **Jesus’ welcome message**—His greeting—to everyone on the mountain?

Think about who was sitting before Him:

* The old man who has wondered all his life if he is good enough for God to save.
* The woman crushed by grief after multiple miscarriages—abandoned by her husband, invisible to the world.
* The young man who ran away from home because he refused to follow his father’s violent life.
* The widow who has longed for justice in her town and quietly helps others.
* The wealthy businessman who uses his influence to bring peace, even at great personal cost.

To each of them Jesus says: Makarioi!  
Congratulations!  
Welcome!

* You who are poor in spirit.
* You who mourn and feel broken.
* You who feel unimportant.
* You who are searching for God with all your heart.
* You who are peacemakers, even if you feel uncertain or dirty or overlooked.

Welcome—because you are the kind of people I want in My Kingdom.  
You are the ones who will inherit the earth.  
You will be deeply comforted.  
You will taste true justice—because you sit at the feet of the true Judge.  
The blessings promised in the Old Testament are now within your reach.  
Congratulations, and welcome—because you sit at the feet of the One who has brought the Kingdom of heaven near.

**In closing**, dear friends, I believe that although there is a list of traits we can aspire to, the heart of Jesus’ message lies more in the blessing and the welcome than in a list of demands.

This is what every true encounter with God should be like:  
His promises make a tangible difference—right now, and for eternity—because He doesn’t hesitate to meet us where we are.

This morning, He shows us His glory again.  
He confirms Himself as Judge.  
He strengthens His relationship with us.

And with this blessing and welcoming greeting, He calls for obedience and a completely new way of thinking and living.

**How do you feel**, knowing that Jesus Christ Himself congratulates and welcomes you, because you are standing at the threshold of His Kingdom?

Rejoice and be glad—Jesus sees you.  
Heaven and earth meet.  
The Kingdom of heaven has come near.

What does such a Kingdom look like?  
We’ll explore that in the coming weeks.

**Amen.**