Great Is Your Reward: The Rest of the Beatitudes

MATTHEW 5:7-12 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

When people turn on you for following Jesus, that's not proof God walked out on you. It puts you in the same room as every prophet who ever told the truth, and it means you belong to the King so completely that his enemies treat you like they treated him.

Opening Lines

Jesus just told a hillside full of fishermen and mothers and day laborers that being pushed out, lied about, and hated could be a mark of blessing. Nobody in that crowd wanted that sentence. Let's find out why he said it anyway.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to see that mercy, purity, and peacemaking aren't personality traits but the shape of people who belong to Christ, and that reproach for his name is fellowship with him, not abandonment by him.
- If you're short on time, cut: If time runs short, cut the cross-reference tour through James and Peter and keep the empty chair and the word study on 'blessed.'
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the moment someone admits they've quietly avoided the cost of following Jesus, and hears that the cost itself is where he meets them.
- Your prep: Do the central exercise yourself before Sunday: name the one place following Jesus has actually cost you something. Come having felt the sting, not just prepared to describe it.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening with the show of hands (5 min). Read Matt 5:7-12 aloud, then teach 'makarios' with the house-on-rock image (10 min). Empty chair exercise — who's not here who hears this differently (7 min). Questions 1-3 with disciplined silence (15 min). Landing: out-loud commitments and the big idea verbatim (8 min). Transformation happens in the empty-chair moment when the room stops talking to itself. Cut the cross-reference tour first if you're behind.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening with the low-stakes memory (7 min). Read the passage; teach

'makarios' (10 min). Empty chair (8 min). All five questions, going first yourself on question 4 and holding full silence (25 min). Out-loud commitments and spontaneous prayer over what was named (10 min). Transformation lives in question 4 where someone admits the cost felt like abandonment and hears it reframed as fellowship. Cut question 1 first — it's a warm-up you can skip.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — your own honest question about whether you believe Jesus (5 min). Read the passage together on a phone, no problem (3 min). One line of teaching on 'blessed' meaning well off in the storm (4 min). Questions 2 and 4 only, both of you answering (13 min). Name one costly choice each for the week and pray it in one sentence (5 min). Transformation happens when you admit your own doubt first and they match it. Cut the teaching note before you cut the personal question.

Silence

Here's a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately: after you ask a real question, stop talking. Count to ten in your head before you rescue the room. Most teachers panic at four seconds and answer their own question, which trains the group to wait you out. This week, pick your two best questions ahead of time and commit to full silence after each — no rephrasing, no 'anyone?', no filling the gap. Let it get slightly uncomfortable. The discomfort is people actually thinking. If you break early even once tonight, notice it and name it to yourself. This is level one: just learn to keep your mouth shut long enough for someone else to speak first.

Why This Passage Matters

These are the verses people skip. We love 'blessed are the merciful' and 'blessed are the peacemakers,' and then the passage turns a corner most of us would rather not follow: blessed are you when they insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. That's a hard word to teach, and it's a harder word to live. But here's what makes it urgent for your room. Every person sitting in front of you has, at some point, wondered whether the cost of following Jesus meant something had gone wrong. A cold shoulder at work. A family that thinks the faith is embarrassing. A quiet exclusion they can't quite name. Matthew wrote these words for people being thrown out of the synagogue — losing worship, community, identity, all at once. Jesus doesn't tell them to grit their teeth and survive. He tells them to be glad, because the reproach itself proves whose they are. When you teach this, you get to hand real people the thing that reframes their loneliness as fellowship with the crucified and risen Lord. That's not a consolation prize. It's the King himself. Not many passages let you do that.

Catch the Fire First

Before the room does this, you do it. Sit down this week and finish one sentence honestly: 'Following Jesus has cost me _____.' Not a heroic story — a real one. Maybe it's the

friendship that cooled when you stopped going along with the crowd. Maybe it's a relative who calls your faith a phase. Sit in that sting long enough to feel it, then hold it up against Jesus' words: 'Rejoice and be glad.' Ask yourself whether you actually believe the reproach put you in the prophets' company, or whether part of you still reads it as God's absence. Whatever you find, that's what you'll teach from — not a polished lesson about persecution but a person who has felt the edge of it and found Christ on the other side.

Bring Your Own Story

- Prompt: a time following Jesus cost you a relationship, a promotion, or standing with people you cared about.
- Prompt: a moment you chose mercy when the sharp reply was already loaded and ready.
- Sample (polished-vs-real): Polished — 'God taught me to forgive through a difficult season.' Real — 'My brother owed me an apology for two years, and last spring I finally stopped waiting for it and just called him first, and my hands were shaking.'
- Guardrail: keep it one moment, not a raw dump — you're opening a door for them, not processing your own wound in front of them.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Show of hands, no explanation needed: has following Jesus ever cost you something real — a friendship, a job, standing with your own family? Keep your hand up a second. Now hear what Jesus says about exactly that: 'Rejoice and be glad.' We're going to figure out how he could possibly mean it."

Start with a shared tension before resolving it, so the payoff lands.

SMALL GROUP: "Think of a time someone rolled their eyes at your faith, or you got quietly left out because of it. Nothing dramatic — just the little sting of being the odd one out. Hold that in mind. Jesus opens the last of the Beatitudes talking to people who knew that sting far worse than we do."

A concrete, low-stakes memory unlocks a room faster than an abstract question.

COFFEE: "Can I ask you something? Has believing this stuff ever actually cost you anything? Because I've been sitting with this passage where Jesus says getting hated for his name is a blessing, and I honestly don't know if I believe him yet. Let's read it and talk."

One honest question from you gives them permission to be honest back.

Teaching the Word

The word to teach is 'blessed' — in Greek, makarios. We hear it as 'happy,' a mood, a good day. But makarios isn't a feeling that comes and goes with your circumstances. It's a settled state of being genuinely well off, deeply and permanently fortunate, regardless of

what's happening to you. Here's the physical image: picture a house built on rock in a storm. The wind is howling, the rain is coming sideways, and the house is fine. That's makarios. Jesus isn't saying the merciful and the persecuted feel happy. He's saying they are — right now, in the storm — profoundly well off, because their standing rests on something the weather can't reach. When he says 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you,' he means: while they're doing it, you are already better off than they are. Sit with the line the whole passage builds toward: 'Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.' [Let the silence sit. Don't explain it. Let them feel how strange and how solid it is.]

Discussion Questions

1. Which of these — merciful, pure in heart, peacemaker, persecuted for righteousness — is the hardest one for you to picture yourself in, and why?

Coaching note: This is a warm-up; let several people answer. Don't correct anyone. You're just getting honest self-assessment onto the table.

If it stalls: Simpler: which one of those four words describes someone you admire — and would people use that word about you?

2. Jesus tells persecuted people to 'rejoice and be glad.' Be honest — does that command feel comforting or impossible to you?

Coaching note: Both answers are welcome. If someone says impossible, don't rush to fix it — that honesty is where the passage does its work. Let it stand a moment.

If it stalls: Yes-or-no way in: if a friend got fired for their faith and you told them to 'be glad,' would that help them or make it worse?

3. The blessings shift halfway through — the merciful are blessed for what they are, but the persecuted are blessed 'because of Me.' What changes when the reason for the blessing becomes a Person instead of a trait?

Coaching note: This is the theological hinge. Guide gently toward it: the reward stops being what you earn and becomes who you belong to. Don't lecture it — pull it out of them.

If it stalls: More concrete: what's the difference between being praised for being a nice person and being hated because you're on Jesus' side?

4. Jesus says being reproached puts you in the company of the prophets. Where have you felt the cost of following Jesus — and did it feel like honor or like abandonment?

Coaching note: This is the vulnerable one. Go first if the room is quiet — use your own prepared answer. After you share, hold full silence. Do not rescue it.

If it stalls: Lower the bar: name one small moment — a comment, an exclusion, an eye-roll — where believing this cost you even a little.

5. If the reward Jesus promises is 'kept in heaven where no synagogue ruling can touch it,' how should that change the way we count the cost of following him right now?

Coaching note: Push toward commitment, not just insight. Ask, 'So what does that free you to do this week that you've been avoiding?' Let the answers get specific.

If it stalls: Make it personal: is there one thing you've held back on — a conversation, a stand — because you were afraid of what it would cost?

Questions You May Hear

"What kind of persecution did Jesus' original hearers actually face?"

For Matthew's Jewish readers, the sharpest edge wasn't Roman soldiers but being expelled from the synagogue under a ban called the herem — losing worship, community, and standing among your own people all at once. John says some feared to confess Christ openly rather than be put out of the synagogue.

"Why does Jesus bring up the prophets at the end?"

Israel always treated its truest messengers as troublemakers — Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the rest. Jesus is saying being cast out for him isn't evidence God abandoned you; it places you in the honored company of the faithful who came before.

"Does 'pure in heart' mean sinless? Because then who could ever see God?"

It doesn't mean flawless — it points to an undivided heart, one that's been washed clean by God himself, echoing Psalm 24's 'clean hands and a pure heart.' It's about wholeness of devotion, not perfection you manufacture.

"Is 'reward in heaven' just a bribe to get us to endure suffering?"

No — the reward isn't a payoff for surviving something awful. The reward is the King himself, already yours in the present tense: 'theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' The joy comes from fellowship with Christ, not compensation for pain.

For Experienced Leaders

- When you get to the persecution verses, resist making it about global martyrs first. Land it locally — the family dinner, the office — or the room will nod at something safely far away and dodge the passage entirely.
- Set an actual empty chair in the circle before you start. At the persecution section, ask: who's not in this room who reads this completely differently — the one who left the faith because it cost too much, the exhausted single mother, the skeptic? Let the group name who belongs in that chair and what this passage asks of them.
- Watch your ten-count silence after the vulnerable question. If you panic and rescue it, you've just taught the room that hard questions get answered by the teacher. Hold the discomfort.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Before we close, out loud: name one place this week where following Jesus is going to cost you a small choice — a mercy you'd rather withhold, a peace you'd rather not make, a stand you'd rather duck. Just name it. We'll hold it for each other.

Close by praying out loud over the actual things people just named — the specific mercy, the specific stand, the specific relationship. Don't reach for a written prayer; say their words back to God so they hear their own commitment lifted up.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question three, stop there. The hinge — that the blessing rests on whose you are, not what you are — is enough for one night. Don't force the vulnerable question if the trust isn't built yet.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, send one text: 'Did that thing you named Sunday cost you anything yet? Praying it did — and that Jesus met you in it.'

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/matthew/5-7-12/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- Finish the sentence honestly: 'Following Jesus has cost me _____.'
- Which Beatitude is hardest for you to see yourself in — and one word for why:
- Write the name of one person NOT in this room who would hear this passage completely differently:
- 'Rejoice and be glad' — does that feel comforting or impossible to you right now? Why:
- Name one place this week where following Jesus will cost you a small choice:

Take-home actions:

- Pick one conversation today where mercy is the harder road — the apology you're owed, the relative who keeps repeating the same mistake — and choose the gentle reply instead of the sharp one you've rehearsed.
- Be a peacemaker in one real disagreement at work: ask a clarifying question, name the common goal out loud, and stay in the room when it's easier to leave.
- If someone mocks your faith or twists your words, don't scramble to defend yourself. Answer with calm kindness and let the sting pass without retaliation.

Blessed — makarios — means genuinely well off in the storm, because your standing rests on something the weather can't reach.