



Red Letter City
The Beatitudes
April 10, 2016
Courage Church,
Detroit, MI.

I am very excited about starting this new series. In fact, it is a series that I have really anticipated giving from the time that we first got here, but believe that God strategically had me hold off on it.

Really, in the first eleven months of being your pastors, Dawn and I

spent quite a bit more time studying and teaching you about the Old Testament, than even the New. But today begins a new series, all about the words that Jesus gave in the most famous sermon of all time, “the sermon on the mount.”

Today is going to be different. Mostly, I am going to talk to you. Just share my heart a bit because I believe that a lot of the things that we are going through even as a church, should bring a much more clear understanding for what Jesus was trying to do when he gave us this incredible sermon. So I am just sort of going to talk to you... Then I am going to teach a little bit about the beatitudes, which are how Jesus begins the sermon on the mount. And really, as we will see in the following weeks, the beatitudes are really the foundational text to Jesus’ great sermon, and a lot of the latter teachers are applications to them.

Now... There is no way that I can explain these to you in one week, we would be here forever. There are 8 beatitudes, so what I am going to do today is kind of touch on them broadly, and then starting this Thursday at Equip, for 8 weeks we are going to teach on each beatitude, one a week...

and we are going to kind of try and open it up as a discussion. I will teach for about 20 or so minutes on each one, and then we will talk about it and wrestle with any questions that may come up... and then we will pray.

The reason I am going to take so much time during Equip to do this is, it is very difficult to understand the Christian life, and the way of Jesus, apart from the beatitudes... but obviously if we took one a week on Sunday morning, this series would go until the end of the year. As it is now, it will still be the longest series that we have done yet... but because each week is a whole new section and a whole new topic, every week should feel pretty different for you guys.

So lets get started.

If you would open your bibles to 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

“²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

Prayer.

Many of you who are familiar with the bible know that I just read a passage by the apostle Paul. This is not from the sermon on the mount. It is not from Jesus at all... but what I believe this scripture that the Apostle Paul penned is doing, is it is showing us the effect that Jesus' incredible sermon has had on the church. and really, in some ways it even shows us “the why.”

Why did God chose the things that the world considers foolish, to shame the wise? Why did he chose the weak to shame the strong?

Right there in verse 29 it tells us... so that no human being might boast.

You see guys, when we accomplish things on our own might, and our own strength... and we come up with these great ideas that turn into careers or huge breakthroughs in our lives... it becomes very easy to begin to rely on our own strength. But what God does is he takes the one who would on their own accord never be able to do anything of true significance, and he uses that person in amazing ways so that it may always remain obvious that it is God who is moving on behalf of his people. We can't boast in something that we obviously did not do.

When the disciples are arguing (Matthew 18) about which one of them will be the greatest... WHO IS GOING TO ACHIEVE THE MOST???? what does Jesus say?

He tells them that whoever humbles themselves like a child, that person will be the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.

What is he saying?

Why is a child so humble?

Because a child doesn't have a history of accomplishments that they put on a shelf like a trophy and point their friends to when they are arguing over who is the greatest.

A child doesn't find their worth in what they accomplished because they haven't really accomplished much yet, and even if they did, they don't think like that yet.

Jesus says "be like the kids!" That is what will make you great in the Kingdom.

What does it look like to be a citizen in Christ's kingdom?

and so we are naming our series "Red Letter City."

Now, let me explain this title.

As much as we want the city of Detroit to be a red letter city, a city that follows the teachings of Jesus and loves people like He loved them... this

series is not about Detroit. What I am referring to as “The Red Letter City” is the Kingdom of Heaven, which is really what the entire sermon on the mount is all about.

The sermon on the mount is about what life should look like in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Because the truth is you guys. Our world... the world we live in... our city... our nation... it is broken guys. It is.

Let me try and personalize this...

Last week my family went on vacation. It was the kids spring break, and Dawn’s mom blessed us with an awesome place to stay in Orlando. It was a really great time.

so we were gone for a little over a week.

And even in that small window of time... in fact, only two short days into the trip, one family in our church had a baby... they welcomed new life into this world that they get to be stewards of now. A crying bundle of joy, we got to go and visit them as soon as we got back and it was just so good to see this child born, healthy. The mom doing great. A beautiful child.

And they rejoiced, and we rejoice with them because Romans 12:15 says to rejoice with those who rejoice.

But then right after that, it says to mourn with those who mourn.

and only a day later, while we were still gone in Florida and completely disconnected from what was happening here, another family in our church faced a tragedy.

and I received the message of this news, and man, it crushed me. Because people matter... every one of you matter, and even if Paul hadn’t said to mourn with those who mourn I believe that i would still mourn. Because even though my life is so full of imperfections, Christ is working on my heart every day and making him more and more like him... and he hurts for

people... and in those moments a mourning position becomes the only sensible one.

When you live elbow to elbow with people that you come to love and then something happens in their life that only happens because we live in a world that is just so broken... man, all you can do is mourn.

You have to understand that this message is about a Kingdom.

Because this Kingdom of heaven that is here on earth is standing opposite to the earthly kingdom that we live in. And the earthly one is completely broken. and how our Kingdom engages that one will determine the fate of our city. Peoples souls are at fate. Peoples eternities are depending on us to learn how to love them in a way that shows them Jesus.

Detroit's future depends on the Red Letter City.

It depends on us bringing heaven to earth, because everything in this kingdom is so fickle. It is fleeting... it is changing.

Things for both families were one way, and then you blink, and it all changed.

Things change in this kingdom.

But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

and when tragedy hits it makes you evaluate your life. The way you are raising your family. The way you treat your spouse, and your friends, and those who God puts in your path.

Even when I look at my life... it seems like it is just flying by. We have been pastors here almost a whole year... May 1 will make a year. That is crazy. I met Dawn ten years ago this June, and the last ten years have just flown by.

I blinked, and I have three kids, and have lived in Lansing, Los Angeles, three of the five New York burroughs and now Detroit.

and I want to make every moment count... so that every person that I come in contact with on that journey comes in contact with Jesus... because He is in me and that should be obvious.

Something else happened the week I was gone that really made me wonder about those things... it made me wonder, "does my life look like Jesus? Am I shining the light of Jesus everywhere I go? And made me seek Jesus' face in prayer because man, I want to raise my family in a way that ushers in the Kingdom of heaven. I want my home to be a haven for my children as much as anyone else who enters it... that they look to our family and they see Jesus. I want to be an example like so many others have set for me.

There is a family I grew up with. A great family. Several members of this family are very close friends of Dawn and I.

In the first two days that we were gone on our vacation, their grandmother passed away. She lived in Lansing so all of their family who live all over the country now, from Wisconsin to Philadelphia, all regrouped here in Michigan... for a funeral.

and one of them posted a picture of her grandfather... the man who had just lost his wife, and he is sitting around a table surrounded by all of his children. And he is kind of smiling in this picture, and moving his arms in a way that it is obvious he is teaching his adult children, even in that moment. And all of their heads are facing him and their eyes are locked on him.

and I couldn't help but wonder as I stared at this picture... "What is he teaching them in that moment?" that would cause them to look with such anticipation for what he was sharing, in the midst of such a brokenness and void that they all had to of been feeling...

and then I wondered, how did he and his wife manage to raise that many kids up in such a way that they still hung on every word that he says?

When everything about our world is despair and pain and disappointment how did this family turn out ok?

How is it that some people can rejoice even when they mourn?

How is it that in the middle of loss, people can come together and somehow, in some amazing way, they can do something collectively that just feels like Jesus. That's just this beautiful reflection of what he is like.

Like he is there.

Like everything that is supposed to be wrong, is going to turn out ok.

It's almost as if they have learned a secret. and I am not sure if I have learned it myself yet or not, but if I had to guess as to what it is, it would be this.

That Jesus lives in the broken places of our hearts.

That he came to call the sinner... the broken one.

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor... but those who are sick."

But what if the secret is just realizing, "We are all sick."

Some of us just don't know it yet.

Jesus came to call the ones who can humble themselves enough to know that no matter how hard they try to elevate themselves they will always end up on the bottom unless they choose on their own accord to live at the bottom.

but what a lot of people do is they spend their whole entire lives thinking that they are living for Jesus... claiming Jesus... championing Jesus! But they are trying to get to the top.

They are following their own interests.

But when you actually look at the words of Jesus, and you line that up with your life, you realize your life looks nothing like Jesus.

You aren't actually following Him.

Jesus says in Luke (6:40) that a disciple, when he is fully trained, he will not be better than his teacher, but he will be like him.

And you guys know me... you don't have to be around here for very long to know that I believe with all of heart in grace. I believe with all of my heart that you are not saved by what you do you are saved by what Jesus did. But the point of the sermon on the mount, beginning with the beatitudes and continued all the way to the story of the man who built his house of the rock and the other man who built his house on the sand... is about so much more than you getting into heaven because of how gracious Jesus is.

It is about teaching you to be gracious, so that you can take some people with you because when they look at the fruit of your life it leads them to want what you have.

it is about teaching you to take the low position...

and its much more than just salvation.

The entire sermon on the mount is Jesus giving us a clear description of what it means to live your life in the Kingdom of heaven. In Luke's gospel it is called "the Kingdom of God" - but it means the same thing.

It is a Kingdom that we can look forward to and it is a Kingdom that exists here and now, in the midst of the broken one.

It is a red letter city within a dark and dying one - and its message is life.
its message is hope.
its message is grace.

but its not just grace so that you can experience it, and let it separate yourself from the rest of the world.

no. This is a city in a city.

and IT IS THE ONLY THING that will change the world.

and really, what we are about to read in a moment when we read through the beatitudes, what we are reading is what a life transformed by Jesus really, clearly, should look like. And as we look today, and really as we study this incredible sermon for the next few months, I want you guys to look at the way that Jesus describes the way he expects things to operate in his kingdom, and compare, and use that as a standard when you are evaluating your life, and where you stand.

Does your life line up with the Kingdom that Jesus describes? Is this standard your standard?

Because for comforts sake, I think what a lot of us do is, if we read these things at all, we read them with a filter. Because obviously Jesus doesn't mean THAT. I love what Martin Lloyd Jones says about the sermon on the mount, he says something like "if you believe that anything in this sermon is impossible, your understanding and interpretation of it must be wrong... the Lord EXPECTS us to do these things."

But what we do, is we try and read them in ways that make sense for OUR lives, BUT THEY DON'T.

And that is the point.

We try to read the red letters is as much as they benefit us in this Kingdom not realizing that our job is to be a part of ushering in a new kingdom. A better one. and it looks opposite of the one we were raised in.

In this kingdom, the first shall be last.

In this kingdom, the ones who lay down their power and lay down their rights are the ones who inherit the earth.

In this kingdom the ones who are pushed around, and marginalized, and outcast for the sake of Jesus are the ones whom the kingdom belongs too.

It is a kingdom that we both are looking forward to when Jesus returns, and the kingdom that is here, now. Right in the midst of this broken one.

and the world was broken then too.

The whole thing was so filled with sin.

and then Jesus shows up.

And John the baptist baptizes him.

Then he goes into the wilderness, and is tempted by the devil. And the devil makes him all sorts of promises. He takes Jesus up on a very high mountain and he shows him all of the kingdoms of this world and he tells him "all of these will be yours if you bow down and worship me."

You have to notice this. You have to understand what the Devil was promising him. He was promising Jesus the whole world... this whole kingdom... if he could just somehow stop Jesus from bringing us the new kingdom.

and after Jesus overcomes the devil in all three temptations, he comes down... he finds out that John the baptist had been arrested... he retreats for a time and then he began preaching... and the first thing that Matthew records Jesus as saying after the devil promised him the whole world was this... Matthew 4:17 - From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

I love this so much. The way that this builds. The way he overcomes the temptation to have the entire Kingdom and the whole story kind of peaks at him coming back and establishing here and now that the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived.

Jesus had overcome evil and the temptation to own it all and instead came to us saying, "there is a new way." and here it is.

and that is where we pick up with Matthew 5, verse 1-12.

"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him."

Rabbis in that day... they would sit down when they were teaching with authority. It is significant that he gave this message sitting down instead of standing up. His audience would have been so locked in on him and what he was saying because they knew it carried a great deal of weight, because he sat down to teach it.

The Beatitudes

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is the foundation for the entire sermon on the mount. Every example and story and teaching that Jesus gives following the beatitudes in the sermon on the mount are, to one degree or another, the way the beatitudes apply in real life.

These things are at the core of who we should be. Of what a life transformed by the grace of Jesus looks like. These are things that we should be... all of them.

But here is the problem. This is what a lot of people do. It is so easy to come to Jesus when you are broken. When you realize how messed up you are. The beautiful thing about the gospel is that Jesus meets the broken. He meets them right where they are. But when we change, and we start following the things that Jesus laid out, if we aren’t really careful we can fall into an even worse trap than the life of a “sinner” and that is the life

of a Pharisee. A person who is full of sin but doesn't know it because they pride themselves on following the rules.

We don't want to walk around scarred by our sin... but we always need to remember that we come to Jesus daily, broken.

So Jesus gives us this list of all sorts of things, and most people read it and think that it is describing all of these different types of people who will have favor with God because of this one attribute that they possess in life. and he is, but he is not telling us that we should be one of these, he is saying that these types of people collectively show us what a life transformed by the Spirit will look like. Jesus here is not describing 8 different classes of people, he is talking about one type of person.

These are the characteristics of the people whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to.

This list is like a staircase of life changes and they speak to our character more than they do anything visible. But they build off of each other. Before you can truly mourn the way the beatitudes describes mourning, you first have to be poor in spirit. Before you can truly be meek, you must mourn. Before you can hunger and thirst for righteousness, you must be meek.

and again, I am going to spend much more time on each of these during Equip in the next few weeks, but lets look at them briefly now.

Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Poor in Spirit

Being poor in spirit is the essence of the Christian faith. It means that same as when Jesus said that if anyone wants to be first, he must be last.

It is the ultimate understanding that we are utterly and completely lost and without hope apart from Jesus.

It is a dependency of Jesus. We don't do it ourselves. Of course we tried... we tried for years... and at the end of all of that we come now to the table broken and alone and poor.

and ours is the Kingdom of heaven.

blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted:

Those who mourn

James says something incredible at the very beginning of this book... now, a lot of people believe that the entire book of James is really James' interpretation, or his take on, the Sermon on the mount. But he says "consider it a joy when various trials come your way..." because it produces something in you... something that you simply can not produce on your own.

But that can be very hard pill to swallow.

and there are so many moments in our lives when we mourn... and hopefully we all know enough by now, and have the grace enough to know that when people mourn, they don't need explanations.

God will work through their life. He will produce something in them through it... and he might even work through you... but the way to be there for a person who is mourning is to mourn.

We don't always just mourn for our own brokenness, we mourn when people we love are broken. When Jesus came to Lazarus' tomb and he saw Martha and Mary, he wept. He didn't weep because Lazarus died, Jesus knew from the beginning he was going to raise him from the dead. But he wept for his friends... for Martha and Mary who had just experienced total loss.

Mourn for those who mourn. mourn for our world. You will be comforted, and you will be a comfort.

and then it says blessed are the meek, for their shall inherit the earth.

The meek

We studied this word, meek, when we did our series on the fruit of the Spirit. It is the Greek word *praotēs* (*pra-o-tace*) - The word comes from a wild animal, that has been tamed.

and the best way to describe what it means to be meek is not weakness, as many believe... in fact a person who is meek typically would have strength... you just wouldn't know it by looking at them, or by watching them, or by interacting with them.

A person who is meek is a person who has "restraint." Total, complete, restraint.

A meek person could be criticized and even defamed and they are so incredibly strong that they would not push back or fight back against it.

Meekness is without a doubt the rarest of qualities on this list. It is a humility that is only found a person that the Holy Spirit has totally taken ahold of. This is not something you can just achieve on your own.

But it is fascinating because Jesus is actually quoting a Psalm when he says that the meek shall inherit the earth... and Hebrew word for meek that King David uses in the Psalm is the word anawin. And the anawin was not a characteristic to be attained it literally was a name given to a group of people... a group of people who had no voice. They completely lacked the social status, power, the money. They were poor, vulnerable, outcast, and marginalized.

Those are the people who will inherit the earth. So how does that apply?

So imagine having *everything*... and having to restrain your life to the point of living like the anawin. That is what it means to be meek.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Then it says “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be SATISFIED.

Most people want to run their own lives. They want control. To so many of us, Jesus is meant to come alongside of us and take us where WE want to go.

But it is ones who hunger and thirst for something that they can't achieve on their own who will truly be filled.

and again, we are going to teach on all of these one at a time on Thursday's, so I can't spend to much time on them... but after the forth, something changes.

You see, what the first four beatitudes are really all about, is realizing that you have an incredible need. There is a void in you that you can not fill on your own. The ones whom the kingdom of heaven belongs to are the ones who submit to the fact that you can not save yourself. You can't.

You can't do it on your own strength. So instead you restrain your own strength and you let Jesus do the heavy lifting.

and then, half way through the beatitudes, something changes.

You see the first four beatitudes tell you, really, what it takes to become a Christian. It describes what it looks like to be completely dependent on Jesus. Remember guys, you are not saved by works. You are saved by the cross of Jesus Christ... his perfect work... the only perfect work.

Salvation comes by realizing, “oh my gosh, I can't do this myself. I need someone else to carry me.”

and that is what the first four beatitudes are referencing.

Then Jesus moves into what your new life in the Kingdom of heaven looks like. When Jesus has a hold of your life:

You are merciful. You are pure in heart. You make peace everywhere you go... and... you are persecuted.

The merciful

We have talked about this one an awful lot since we have been here. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy.

We have said, Grace is getting what you don't deserve... and mercy is not getting what you do deserve. So if you are merciful toward others, you would not give them what they deserve.

I love what R.T. Kendall says about mercy in his book about the sermon on the mount, and this guy really dives into this sermon in this book and would be a great resource for you, but he says: "True graciousness-showing mercy-is letting people off the hook. It is doing what you can do to see they never get caught **for what they did to you**.... True graciousness is not reminding people of their faults, their failures or their past. It is not even letting on as if you know what they have done."

With everything that Jesus has done for us, how could we not show mercy to others?

These things just become who we are. But this particular beatitude is so interesting because it says "blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

This is the only one that they are given what they give.

I've always said that if there is one thing that will keep you separated from the God you think you are serving, it is an unforgiving, unmerciful heart toward someone else.

Blessed are the pure in heart...

The pure in heart

for they will see God.

This one will be a fun one to really break down in EQUIP. But what is in your heart is who you are. It is what you believe. It is how your mind translates into your motivations and even your actions. The decision to follow Jesus is one of the heart. and the only way to have a pure heart before Jesus is to come to him poor in spirit, mourning... meek... hungry for righteousness, and having shown mercy to others.

And so next comes...

The peacemakers

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Sons of God.

I want this reward. That is for sure.

There is a very big difference between a person who keeps peace, and a person who makes peace. There is a difference between someone who can keep order in a difficult situation, and someone who can throw themselves in the center of a seemingly unsolvable conflict and figure out a way to solve it. Peace makers are very rare.

Blessed are those persecuted for my names sake...

Those persecuted for my names sake

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

I think that, where meekness is probably the most difficult part of the first half of the list, this is the hardest part of the second four.

And obviously, you have to be meek to have the strength that it takes to be persecuted... and to receive it as a blessing.

The first and the last one have the same reward.

“Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Why are they the same?

It comes full circle.

The first is the root, the last is the result.

The root of Christianity, the foundation, is in coming to Christ broken... poor in spirit, knowing you can not make it on your own. And the result of that is a life that is not of this world. It is a transferring from the Kingdom of darkness, into the Kingdom of light... the kingdom of heaven.

But you still live here.

It makes you a alien. A refugee. A foreigner. and not everybody is going to like you because of it.

and I am sure many of you are thinking, "thats not the life I want! I don't want to give up everything, and develop all of these characteristics, and let the Holy Spirit do such an amazing work in my life, just so I can be persecuted.

This blows comfortable Christianity out of the water in one sentence.

Blessed are you when people persecute you for my names sake!

It goes on to say "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In Luke it says it the other way... it says WOE TO YOU... when everyone speaks well of you. Because if everyone loves you then you aren't standing for anything. Theres no way you are. Not everyone loved Jesus. The gospel is radical. It is upside down. It changes everything. The ones who thought they were in, are out... and the ones who know they can never make it in on their own are in.

That message will make some people mad. Jesus says this in Matthew 10:

¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher.

Jesus is our teacher. and it is enough to be like him. And the beatitudes teach us what it means to be like him. He sends us out as sheep in midst of wolves... but notice, we are still wise... we are wise as serpents and yet innocent as doves... we are meek.

and they will persecute us. Just like they persecuted Jesus. They will arrest us and flog us and put us on trial... But because we are poor in spirit, and we KNOW IT... we don’t have to rely on knowing what to say in that hour - the Spirit that we can depend on to be our strength will be our strength.

The beatitudes are in an amazing way, Jesus teaching us about the Holy Spirit, without even once speaking his name.

Because every one of these characteristics are works of the Spirit in your life. They are the secret to having a great life in this Kingdom, and to ushering others into the Kingdom still to come.

These are the characteristics that I saw in the photo of my friends grandfather... teaching his children, as a family grew closer and stronger through mourning and brokenness. Because Jesus met them in that moment. He was there.

and he is here today, in your brokenness. In your loneliness. In your depression. In your anxiety. In your loss and your pain.

guys, Matthew 5-7 is the sermon on the mount. It is the greatest sermon ever taught by the greatest teacher who ever lived. But Matthew 5 is really where the red letters start in the sermon on the mount, but Matthew 4:23 begins by describing the setting. and it describes the crowd.

And it says that in all of these places that Jesus went, he was drawing crowds, and people were bringing him all sorts of sick people, and he was healing them. He was healing the sick. He was healing the afflicted.

And it says that the people who were gathering around him and following him were people afflicted in every sort of way... diseases. pains. People with demons. epileptics, paralytics...

Broken broken people were following Jesus and when he realized how many there were, he went up on this mountain, because in that area if he stood on the mountain, the whole crowd would be able to hear him. and he began preaching this amazing message.

and he wasn't teaching this message to the Pharisees and religious leaders about the type of lives they needed to start living.

He was teaching it to broken people who were already what he was describing.

Everybody else thought they were out. But Jesus tells them they are in.

He was preaching it to the people who were poor. He was preaching it to the people who were mourning. He was preaching it to the anawin... the marginalized... the outcast. the least of these. He was preaching it to the persecuted.

And he was telling them all, you guys are blessed. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the persecuted.

Because in the midst of this broken kingdom... a new kingdom has broken through. and it changes everything.

Because in this new kingdom, its not the rich who who end up with everything. Its not the first who win.

It is the ones who chose to be last.

The ones who know that without Jesus they are nothing.

Without the cross they are the ones who are finished.

And he looks at these marginalized, lost, broken people and he says to them that the characteristics of each of the circumstances represented on that mountain... each of the situations that they are facing now are the shaping principles for what it takes to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Because unless you come to Jesus broken, you can't come to him at all. So the ones who were there had a head start on the rich. They had a head start on the religious. On the Pharisees... on the Sanhedrin.

Because at least they knew they were broken.

and Jesus had the audacity to call them blessed. Because there is a new kingdom. and its here. And its better.