

**The Gospel of Matthew**  
**Week Four**  
**Matthew 4:12-5:12**

**Day One**

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15 "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—16 the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

v. 12 – It seems that John was in prison by the time that Jesus finished his fast. This may or may not have been true, for it wasn't Matthew's goal to provide an exact chronology of events. If this was indeed the case, it would be clear that John's role was finished as soon as Jesus appeared on the scene and began His ministry, as John had predicted: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

Jesus did not take up John's cause, but rather returned to Galilee, from where He had come to be baptized. Both John and Jesus were focused on what God wanted them to do and did not waver. **How focused are you in your purpose?**

v. 13 – Up to the point of His public ministry, Jesus lived in the small village of Nazareth, today mostly an Arab Israeli town. Jesus chose to relocate to Capernaum, perhaps to put some distance between His family and His ministry. Capernaum is no longer inhabited, but the remains of a synagogue and what is considered to be Peter's house are there (a Catholic church was built over the home and is one of the nicer churches in the Holy Land). **Is it in your heart to go to Israel one day? Then why not go now, this year?** Don't put it off; it is a trip that will change your life and the way you read the Bible.

v. 14 – Capernaum was in the region where two tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali, had taken up residence. Matthew was always eager to point out how Jesus' life fulfilled the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus' choice of an adopted home city was itself a fulfillment of what Isaiah had predicted. By my count, this is the seventh instance where Matthew tied an event in Jesus' life to a fulfillment of Scripture. Matthew was true to the purpose for which he wrote.

vs. 15&16 – While Galilee was at one time within the borders of Israel, it was considered by those in Judea to be a place of too many non- or half-Jews. Thus Isaiah prophetically referred to it in advance as a land of Gentiles in Isaiah 9:1. This wasn't the case in Jesus' day, for there were many Jews there. In some sense, however, it was here that Jesus began His ministry, which would ultimately focus on bringing Gentiles to the kingdom of God through Paul and others like him.

Jesus was the light and chose to go to where it was dark. That is what the mission of the Church should be as well. **What are you doing to bring light to dark areas? What more can you do? You don't have to go, but are you supporting those who do?**

## Day Two

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."  
18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

v. 17 – Jesus took up the message that John had been preaching, that men and women should repent. This repentance was necessary because God's government or kingdom was near and would require a new way of living and thinking. It is interesting that Jews were being asked to repent, for they would have been among the more moral citizens in the Roman Empire. They had the Law, the Temple and the sacrificial system of worship, yet Jesus was saying all that wasn't enough to serve or please God.

The Jewish leaders had the most trouble with Jesus' message (and with John's) because they had the most to lose. They made their living from Jewish religious practice, and the repentance message would be bad for business. They would hound and eventually execute Jesus for His message, yet they could not stop the message or the kingdom of God.

v. 18 – Jesus wasn't content to simply preach to the crowds. He made His message "up close and personal." Jesus is depicted in this verse walking by the Sea of Galilee, which is not a "sea" but rather a large lake in northern Israel. It was also known as Lake Gennesaret (see Luke 5:1) and was the main economic source in the region. Jesus saw two brothers who were local fishermen by the Lake as He was walking.

v. 19 – Jesus personalized the call to repentance by commanding Peter and Andrew to come and follow Him. He promised to make them fishers of men, predicting their future role in calling people with the same repentance message as He had been doing.

When seeking to help people find their purpose, I ask what they have done that they have enjoyed. I also ask them to list all the jobs they have ever held. All the while, I am looking for clues, for common characteristics of the roles they have held. That phrase, "fishers of men," is a typical purpose statement: short, concise and pregnant with meaning for the holder. **Do you know what is your purpose is? What do you do that, when you do it, God helps you get results?**

Notice that the brothers' purpose was contingent on following Jesus. While I believe that everyone has a purpose, I don't believe that anyone reaches their full potential or productivity until they follow Jesus. Purpose is something that God assigns and enables you to achieve. God, therefore, has to be the focus for purpose to be maximized.

v. 20 – The brothers left what they were doing and went at once with Jesus. There are conflicting reports concerning Peter’s call, which we don’t have time or space to discuss. Suffice to say that this may not have been the first encounter that Jesus had with these brothers; this incident could have been the culmination of several other encounters.

### Day Three

21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. 23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. 25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

vs. 21&22 – Jesus spotted a second set of brothers who were also fishermen. It is wonderful when families can serve the Lord together. It is not wonderful, however, when families decide that families will serve the Lord together on a church staff when the family hasn’t been called to do so. Jesus *called* the brothers. He didn’t call one brother and the other decided to tag along. In my experience, it creates problems when parents decide that their children will serve in the ministry with them. If the children aren’t gifted, then the rest of the church staff must compensate for their lack of giftedness. I have seen this in more than a few church situations.

Something has been made of the fact that the brothers were mending nets when Jesus called them. I don’t see any relationship between the calling and their work, but there may be one. **Do you see any?**

v. 23 – Jesus now became an itinerating preacher and teacher, going throughout Galilee. Jesus public ministry was three-fold: preaching, teaching and healing. The weakened spiritual condition of the people had led to many physical ailments; by His actions, Jesus indicated that God was concerned not just with their spiritual but also their physical well-being. The church should have the same agenda. And an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the old saying goes. Therefore the Church should be also concerned to keep people from getting sick. Of course, the best way to do this is to teach people how to live according to God’s laws.

v. 24 – News about Jesus spread to the north and east to the Gentiles, as well as south to the Jews. This was because Jesus was healing, reports of which always draw a lot of interest. Why? Because a lot of people were then and are now sick or physically challenged, due to a human condition called sin. Jesus faced every kind of human physical problem – those in pain, the paralyzed, demon-possessed, and those given to seizures. He did not shy away from any of those human problems, and not only faced but

also healed them all! What's more, many of them weren't even Jews, but came from Syria and the surrounding regions.

v. 25 – Large crowds of Jews and Gentiles followed Jesus because there was a spiritual dynamic of life and energy present when they were with Him. There was life in Jesus' touch, in His teaching and in His presence. **Is there life in your presence?** Conditions should improve anywhere when you arrive. People should be more encouraged and have more of a hunger for God due to your presence. **Do you notice this dynamic in your life and work? What can you do for this to happen more than it already does?**

#### Day Four

1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

v. 1 – Jesus was a superb teacher. **How did he ever communicate with the large crowds without an audio system?** At times, He used the topography of the area to do so. There is a Catholic church on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee today and it has an amphitheater next to the lake. If you stand at the bottom of the hill, with your back to the lake, you can speak to the hillside and the slope of the hill carries your voice over a large area. There is a good chance that this is what Jesus did and where He did it.

Today, we have new ways to speak to the masses of people. If you have something to say, people will want to read or hear it. Today, you can have a website, start a blog, do podcasting, use YouTube or any number of other resources that involve technology. When you read this, there may be even newer and more efficient ways to communicate with mass markets.

**Whatever the means, are you utilizing these means to communicate your message and fulfill your purpose? Or are you stubbornly resisting these media, as has often been the case with church and spiritual people? If you aren't resisting, are you fully utilizing their capabilities and possibilities to touch as many people as possible?**

Many of these media involve or require writing, and I encounter many people who feel a need or call to write. Yet many don't write for a variety of reasons, fear usually being the main reason. **Are you afraid to write? Are you afraid of your creative side—afraid that people will laugh or ignore, that it won't be "very good," that you won't have the time to finish? Do you not write or produce creative things because you don't know what you will do with them when you are finished?** I doubt if Jesus had notes, but He certainly addressed the crowds with memorable messages. With His help, you can do the same with whatever medium you choose. I suggest you don't put off creating any longer. The world needs to see or hear what you have inside of you.

vs. 2&3 – Jesus used this time to deliver what we know to be the Beatitudes, thus named because each one starts with “blessed are” and a beatitude is something that leads to a blissful and blessed state. The first Beatitude declared that being poor “in spirit” is a good thing. This has nothing to do with poverty, but rather poverty of spirit that understands the need for God. Those who are most mindful of their dependence on the Lord are blessed. Those who feel like they can make or do it on their own miss the blessing of God’s grace that could be theirs. **Are you poor in spirit?**

v. 4 – Those who mourn are also blessed. **What do they mourn?** Perhaps they mourn their own unspiritual condition or the poor condition of others. Or maybe they mourn the world’s condition when it is cut off from God. I don’t think Jesus meant that we should walk around in black as if we are going to a funeral every day. We should, however, have an element of sadness that creates an urgency to connect the world to our loving and merciful God. Does this make sense?

The kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit and those who mourn will be comforted. Notice that in addition to being “blessed,” there is a practical benefit for each one of the Beatitudes. God rewards those who are His in direct relationship to the choices they make. **If you lack something in or from God, could it be that you are the one blocking the blessing?** Consider that as you read these verses from Psalm 18:

The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty (Psalm 18:20-27).

### Day Five

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

v. 5 – I have always heard meekness interpreted as strength under control. The word was used to describe horses used in war, who were strong animals, yet under total control so as not to run from the noise and chaos of battle. My picture of meekness is the opposite, sort of like a small, frail person who is timid to talk or act. This is not who will inherit the earth. The King James Version states this about Moses:

Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth. (Numbers 12:3).

The New American Standard translates the same verse this way:

Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.

Meekness relates to humility, which means one can have ability or strength but attributes those capabilities to God.

**What does it mean to inherit the earth? Is this a reference to the next age, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth? Or is a reference to the here-and-now, that righteousness brings rewards to this life? It seems to me that every other beatitude has a promise for the now, so why not this one?** I am thinking of what Mark reported Jesus as saying:

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:29-31).

v. 6 – Those who want God will find God. Those who want more of the things of God will find them. Those who want to know God's will, will do so. The issue is a matter of urgency. If you are casual toward God, He will be casual toward you:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" (Psalms 46:1-3).

**How badly do you want God and the matters that are important to Him? Don't answer too quickly.**

v. 7 – I try to keep this verse in mind all the time. I need mercy so it is important that I extend mercy. I don't think this only relates to mercy from God. You reap mercy from others when you sow it into others as well. This is another example, a la Psalm 18, of the power we have to determine how God and others respond to us. **If you are lacking something, therefore, what is it that you aren't giving first?**

v. 8 – We all want to see God, to know who He is and what is important to Him concerning our lives and purpose. If you want to see those things (and Him), you must have a pure heart. **What is a pure heart? Is it a perfect heart?** I don't think so, for I'm not sure our hearts can be perfect this side of the Lord's return. So what is it? It is a heart that has dealt with its "issues" sincerely and openly. It is a heart that has acknowledged its sin and has done its best to deal with those issues. In a sense, someone who has a pure heart is a person who walks in integrity, admitting their sins and failures and dealing with them – whether that means confession, asking forgiveness, or making

restitution. It is a person who recognizes and admits that, apart from God, he or she is capable of doing anything of a sinful nature. **Do you have a pure heart?**

### Day Six

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

v. 9 – As I write, there is a crisis of post-election violence in Kenya. There are those who are trying to bring peace and we bless them and pray for their success. Yet I don't think this is the only kind of situation to which this verse refers. You and I will probably never face a tumultuous situation like in Kenya, but we do face turmoil and chaos every day. I have determined that I will improve the situation, the quality of life, wherever I go. I want people to be more motivated, positive and optimistic wherever I work or visit. I desire that people are happier and smile because of my presence. I want to carry God's peace because, in most cases, that is what Jesus did. I want to be like Him.

v. 10 – Now this is a promise in which I don't always want to participate. I don't want to think about persecution or suffering. There is a suffering for the things I do wrong; that isn't what Jesus is talking about. He is talking about doing God's will and suffering for it. I'll let Peter explain:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good (1 Peter 4:12-19).

#### **Are you suffering? If so, is it for the right reasons?**

vs. 11&12 – Jesus instructed us to rejoice when we are persecuted and suffer for His sake and in His name. Once again, I will let Peter provide an explanation, since he was there when Jesus said this:

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in

your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (I Peter 3:13-17).

**Are you suffering because of Jesus and your testimony? If not, why not? If so, are you rejoicing, knowing that this is how they treated the prophets before you?**

### Day Seven

**I thought it would be interesting for you to do a quick self-evaluation based on the Beatitudes before we move on to the next study. Let's re-examine each one and then give yourself a score from 1 (poor) to 10 (outstanding) for each one. I thought I would also include cross-references from the wisdom books for each one of the Beatitudes to help you further understand what they mean.**

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit.* **Are you aware of your spiritual poverty and dependence on God? In every area of life?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly (Proverbs 18:23).

2. *Blessed are those who mourn.* **Do you have a sense of loss from sin, both your own and others?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

3. *Blessed are the meek.* **Do you have your greatest strengths under control so that they don't also become your greatest weaknesses?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them (Psalm 37:10-12).

4. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.* **Do you have regular periods of seeking the Lord like your life depends on it – because it does?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. The laborer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on. A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire (proverbs 16:25-27).

5. *Blessed are the merciful.* **Are you extending mercy to those who need it?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs (Proverbs 10:12).

He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends (Proverbs 17:9).

6. *Blessed are the pure in heart.* **Is your agenda and personality still dominating your affairs of life, or are you dealing with the motives of your heart?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"? (Proverbs 20:9).

The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him (Proverbs 15:26).

7. *Blessed are the peacemakers.* **Are situations and people better off when you show up?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace (Proverbs 12:20).

8. *Blessed are those who are persecuted.* **Are you suffering for your testimony, for your obedience to God?** Your score \_\_\_\_\_

My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:10).

**In what beatitude did you receive the highest score? The lowest? What is your plan of action based on your scores from this point forward?**