

# Teacher Introduction

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Both Matthew and Luke include the story of the Beatitudes in their Gospels. Matthew depicts Jesus delivering eight Beatitudes in a sermon on a mountain, while Luke depicts Jesus delivering only four Beatitudes in a sermon on a plain. The four Beatitudes that Luke writes about parallel four of the Beatitudes Matthew includes, while using slightly different language. These differences in language can help to deepen our understanding of what Jesus meant by each teaching.

## Created for Happiness

In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus begins each beatitude with the saying, “Blessed are...” and then continues each statement with a teaching on who is blessed and what their reward will be for their blessedness. Some translations of Scripture use the phrase “Happy are...” instead, although the meaning is the same. It is helpful to consider in more detail what Jesus meant when He said “blessed” or “happy” so that we can more fully understand the meaning of the beatitudes. In fact, Jesus’ understanding of blessedness or happiness was very different from the typical understanding of the words today. It is common today for people to talk about doing whatever makes them happy or, similarly, to encounter the hashtag #blessed on social media. In both situations, the words are most likely being used to express the feeling or emotion of pleasure, or the feeling or emotion of being fortunate. In both cases, the happiness or blessedness that is experienced is something that is temporary and fleeting, as all feelings and emotions are. The blessedness and happiness that Jesus had in mind was something very different, something much

closer in meaning to the classical philosophical definition of happiness.

St. Thomas Aquinas, paraphrasing St. Augustine, writes, “All men agree in desiring the last end, which is happiness.” By “last end,” Aquinas means “purpose.” In other words, Aquinas is saying that all men desire to achieve their purpose, which is happiness. He furthers this idea, writing, “To desire happiness is nothing else than to desire that one’s will be satisfied.” Many things in our earthly lives can bring us temporary pleasure, but nothing can fully satisfy our desire to be satisfied or to be fulfilled. Aquinas calls the temporary pleasure that comes from earthly goods an imperfect happiness. Perfect happiness, or blessedness, will be achieved only when we behold in Heaven the Beatific Vision of God, who is all good and perfect. St. Augustine famously writes of this perfect satisfaction in God: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” He understood that only the infinite God satisfies infinitely.

## Imperfect versus Perfect Happiness

God allows us a preview of the perfect happiness that awaits us in Heaven when we experience an imperfect happiness here on Earth. Jesus, in speaking of the model of holiness He has given us, said, “If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it” (John 13:17). Jesus is referring to both faith and works, what we know and what we do, as means to achieve some imperfect happiness here on Earth as well as our perfect happiness in Heaven. Aquinas, of course, agrees with Jesus and writes, “Happiness is the reward of works and virtue.” This understanding of happiness,

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Religious icon, origin unknown



we can conclude, is likely closer to what Jesus means by “Blessed are...” or “Happy are...” than the #blessed of social media, or the temporary pleasure that our modern world describes as happiness. In other words, in the Beatitudes, we can understand Jesus to be saying that those who are poor, those who mourn or weep, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst

for righteousness, those who are merciful, those who are clean of heart, those who are peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness may or may not attain a certain amount of imperfect happiness in their earthly lives but will most definitely be satisfied and fulfilled by God in Heaven.