

Opened Mouths  
Matthew 5:1-12

I'm not sure why it is called the digging game, but it is one I have played with youth groups. It is an icebreaker in which you have one less chair than you have people. The person standing in the center asks a question like, "Who has blonde hair?" Everyone with blonde hair must then get up and find a new chair, but it can't be the one next to them. This gives the one asking the question the opportunity to plop into an empty spot. The one left standing after all the scurrying then asks another question like, "Who is wearing white socks?" which is followed by more scurrying.

This morning we are going to play a variation of that game. You won't need to scurry, and you don't need to worry about losing your seat. Simply stand up then sit down again if you think the question describes you.

Who is poor in spirit?

Who is mourning?

Who is meek?

Who hungers and thirsts for righteousness?

Who is merciful?

Who is pure in heart?

Who is a peacemaker?

Who has been reviled, persecuted, or falsely accused because of Jesus?

*Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them...*

They must have been a crowd of people much different than you. Because why would Jesus have wasted His time teaching a message that didn't apply to hardly any of them? I am certainly not Jesus, but even I try to proclaim a message that applies to as many of you as possible.

If we don't see these beatitudes as describing the way we are, they can come across as Law:

"You're not poor in spirit? What's wrong with you? You'd better work on that if you want to be blessed!"

You don't hunger and thirst for righteousness? Bless your heart. But if you don't change, I don't see how you can ever be blessed."

"You're not pure in heart? That won't do. You need to step up your game and be more pure if you want to be blessed!"

We certainly can make an effort to be more meek, to be more pure, to be a peacemaker. We can even work really hard at it. But how do we know if we have worked hard enough? How do we know if we are poor enough in spirit or mournful enough?

If we get to set our own goal, we may feel like we have achieved it. But do we get to set our own goal? Or is the standard set by God? And what is His demand? Perfection!

One response to God's Law is despair – feeling the weight of our guilt pressing in on us with no hope of overcoming it. We are not able to change our behavior to do what God requires, which rules out any way of appeasing God's just wrath against our sin.

The response of faith is repentance. It begins the same as despair – recognizing our sinfulness – but then moves our eyes away from ourselves and toward our Savior. We see our sin, but the Holy Spirit leads us to also see our Savior. He is the One who can and has appeased God’s wrath against our sin.

Jesus was all of the things He preached in His beatitudes: poor in spirit, pure in heart, persecuted, and all the rest. He was those things for us in our place. Where we fall short, He fulfills completely.

And Jesus’ spirit living within us makes blessed beatitude people. We are not all of them all of the time, but in His time and in His way He is with us to help us be poor in spirit – to see ourselves as sinners in need of His forgiveness. He is with us when we mourn, and comforts us with His promises. His Holy Spirit causes us to hunger and thirst for righteousness – to know God’s will and have a desire to live it out in our lives.

Jesus makes us all pure in heart. He does so by filling our hearts with His forgiveness. And I’m talking about gift received – Jesus’ forgiveness of all our sin. Will we then pour out that gift upon others? It is a Spirit led response. But Jesus’ forgiveness comes with no strings attached. We are not forgiven because we earn it by forgiving others.

Jesus earned our forgiveness all by Himself. He was betrayed and abandoned by those closest to Him. They ran and hid while Jesus was arrested, put on trial, condemned to death and nailed to a cross. He had no help from His disciples as He suffered and died to pay for their sins. He

does not need our help when it comes to the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus has done it all. He was meek before Pontius Pilate. As Isaiah had prophesied, *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth* (53:7). Jesus was everything the Father wanted Him to be. Where time and time again we fall short, Jesus fulfilled. And He did it for you.

Jesus continues to work for you. He is here this morning and has opened His mouth. It looked and sounded like me, but it was Jesus speaking to you in the words of absolution: “I forgive you all your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus is here this morning, and will come to you in your open mouth. He says to you, “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.” “Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

Will you have the opportunity this week to open your mouth to speak meek words, words of peace, words of mercy? You may. But right now there is no doubt about who is doing what for whom. Jesus is here delivering His gifts to you. His mouth is open speaking words of forgiveness. Your mouth will soon be open to receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Blessed are you. Blessed are you! Amen.