

Blessed Are ...

Each Beatitude starts with the words “Blessed are ...;” this declaration may also be rendered as “Happy is the one who ...”

This formula was used many times in the Psalms and in Old Testament wisdom literature, as well as in other New Testament writings. It was a pronouncement of blessedness based on some virtue the person practiced or on good fortune from God. Being “happy” in this context was not a momentary good feeling, but a lasting joy bestowed by God. Sometimes the declaration included a specific blessing; in other places, it may have been implied but not explicitly stated. Some examples:

- Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers. -- *Ps. 1:1-3*
- Happy is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered. Happy the man to whom the Lord imputes not guilt, in whose spirit there is no guile. -- *Ps. 32:1-2*
- Happy is he who has regard for the lowly and the poor; in the day of misfortune the Lord will deliver him. -- *Ps. 41:2*
- Happy are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways! -- *Ps. 128:1*
- (Wisdom says:) Happy the man who obeys me, and happy those who keep my ways, happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts; for he who finds me finds life, and wins favor from the Lord. – *Proverbs 8:33-34*
- Blessed is she who, childless and undefiled, knew not transgression of the marriage bed; she shall bear fruit at the visitation of souls. – *Wisdom 3:13*
- I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” said the Spirit, “let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them.” -- *Rev. 14:13*
- Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. -- *Rev. 19:9* [*We echo this beatitude just before Communion when the presider says, “Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.”*]

Many of the beatitudes found elsewhere in the Bible involve blessings that might be considered an appropriate consequence of one’s behavior, and some of those listed by Matthew do likewise – the merciful obtain mercy, the clean of heart see God, peacemakers are called children of God.

But the four Beatitudes common to both Matthew and Luke present blessings that radically reverse the conditions of those who will receive them. The poor – who have nothing – will have what really matters: the Kingdom. The hungry will be satisfied. Those who mourn will be comforted. Those who are persecuted will have the Kingdom of Heaven. Luke adds to this “reversal of fortune” concept by following the blessings with four woes – warning the rich, the well-fed, the happy and the praised that their good times will come to an end. Thus both evangelists introduce Christ’s teachings with declarations that the Kingdom of God involves real, and possibly unexpected, change.