

Session 1: The Mountain of Happiness

What We Found

Jesus went up the mountain as the new Moses and gave the law of the new covenant: eight statements about who is truly happy. "Blessed" (*makarios*) declares someone genuinely well off in God's judgment, and Jesus' list contradicts the world's list on nearly every line. The first and eighth beatitudes share one present-tense promise, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," framing all eight as a single composition; at verse 11 the sermon turns and addresses you. We tested the strongest rival theory (happiness is pleasure plus good fortune) and found it cannot explain the unhappiness of the people who have everything.

MY GUESS (SEAL IT AND HAND IT IN)

Before the closing prayer tonight, finish this sentence in your own words, seal it in the envelope, sign the flap, and hand it in. It will come back to you, unopened, in Session 5.

"I think what it takes to be truly happy is..."

Voices of the Church

ST. AUGUSTINE · DE SERMONE DOMINI IN MONTE, BOOK I

St. Augustine, at the opening of his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, teaches in substance that whoever ponders this sermon will find in it the perfect measure of the Christian life: everything needed for right living is gathered here. The sermon, for Augustine, is the Gospel's condensed rule of life.

Application (ours, not the saint's): if a group learned only Matthew 5-7 and lived it, they would be recognizably, radically Christian.

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · HOMILIES ON THE BEATITUDES

St. Gregory of Nyssa preached eight homilies on the eight Beatitudes, and he opens with an image the whole series will climb: the Lord teaching on the mountain is calling us up an ascent, step by step, each beatitude leading higher, through the great promise that the pure in heart will see God, and onward still, through peacemaking and persecution, into the kingdom. The Beatitudes, in Gregory's reading, are not eight scattered sayings but one ascent. (The ladder-and-rung shorthand we will use for it is ours, not his vocabulary.)

We will keep Gregory's ladder in view for all eight sessions.

ST. LEO THE GREAT · SERMON 95, ON THE BEATITUDES

St. Leo the Great, preaching on this passage in the fifth century, teaches in substance that the Lord chose the mountain so that the height of the place might match the loftiness of what he taught, and that the same Lord who once spoke to Moses now speaks in person: the giver of the old covenant is the preacher of the new.

Leo's point guards the group against a common mistake: the Sermon on the Mount does not correct the God of the Old Testament; it is the same God, now speaking face to face.

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:12a and say it each morning: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."
- Once this week, catch an advertisement in the act of defining happiness for you. Name its definition in one sentence.
- Read Matthew 5:1-12 once, slowly, before Session 2.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:12a

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

Catechism References

CCC 1716-1719, 1721

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:1-12 once, slowly, and notice which beatitude comes first.