

A black and white, upside-down photograph of a city skyline with various skyscrapers and buildings, serving as a background for the top portion of the slide.

MATTHEW

The Upside down Kingdom

Matthew 5

Disciples are to live differently than the rest of the world.



Matthew 5:1-10

**God's idea of "blessed" is
upside-down from the world's idea.**

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God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- This chapter begins the Sermon on the Mount.
- The structure of Matthew's Gospel is narrative interwoven with five carefully crafted blocks of Jesus's teaching.
- Each block of teaching is topical, marked off by a similar concluding formula—"When Jesus had finished saying these things...."



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- This first (chapters 5–7) and the last (chapters 23–25) are the longest blocks.
- It was typical of ancient writers to rearrange events or teachings, not necessarily to write them chronologically.
- That doesn't mean their accounts aren't accurate or true.



God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- Martin Luther argued that the ethics laid out in the Sermon on the Mount were an impossible demand like the Mosaic law, so they exist just to point us to the need for God's grace.
- Other have argued that they describe the ideal of God's kingdom, which will never be fully realized until the future kingdom.



God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- Though it is impossible to be perfect in this life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as new creations, citizens of God's kingdom should try to live by this ideal, keeping in mind that we will all fall short.
- Jesus' giving these ethics of the kingdom from a mountain is reminiscent of God giving Moses the Law on Mt. Sinai



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- Before Jesus gets into the ethics of the kingdom, in this opening section, He describes those who are "blessed" in God's kingdom.
- The word can mean "happy", but it means a deeper joy or contentment.
- It speaks not of physical blessings but of spiritual blessings that bring contentment and joy.



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- The word for "bless" would call to memory the Aaronic blessing the priests regularly said over the people
- "The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24–26).



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- The list Jesus gives doesn't really sound like blessing the way we typically think of blessing.
- Jesus is teaching us that blessing isn't God's giving us stuff or fixing all our problems, but His being with us through it all.
- Look at verse 4, "those who mourn." Why does it say they will be blessed? "For they shall be comforted."



God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- Have you ever known someone who said they felt closest to God in a time of great suffering or trial?
- In the difficult times that we experience God's comfort, His peace, His blessing.
- We learn to lean on Him and trust Him to provide.



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- Each of the beatitudes ends with some way God's presence satisfies the need.
- These are called "divine passives"—it is implied that God is the One who will satisfy them, show them mercy, etc.
- Blessing is God's presence with us, a God who is near whenever we call on Him (Deuteronomy 4:6–7).



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- Craig Keener writes that these beatitudes describe what kingdom-ready people should be like—humble people who submit to God's kingship and yearn for His will above all else.
- The fact that both the first (v. 3) and the last (v. 10) beatitude end with "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" frames the whole section, meaning it applies to all of them.



God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- Each beatitude shows us just how different the values of the kingdom of God are from the kingdom of this world.
- What is highly esteemed by God (humility, meekness, mercy, etc.) is often scoffed at by the world.
- The world says, "If you want to be happy, pursue success and happiness for yourself." We should give our lives to others.



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- Poor in spirit—Matthew specifies poor "in spirit," not just poor financially. The Greek word reflects humility; it comes from a word which means "to crouch as a helpless beggar."
- Like a beggar, the poor in spirit are painfully aware of their need for God to provide. This is anyone, rich or poor, who humbles himself or herself before God and lives in complete dependence on Him.

A black and white image of a city skyline, including skyscrapers and a bridge, shown upside down. The image is mirrored across a horizontal line, creating a symmetrical, inverted cityscape.

God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- Those who mourn—This can mean mourn or lament.
- They are those who pour out their pain, grief or other "negative emotions" to God rather than blaming Him or holding it all in.
- They will be comforted.

A black and white photograph of a city skyline, including the Burj Khalifa, reflected in water. The image is oriented upside down, with the buildings appearing to rise from the bottom of the frame.

God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- Meek—Meekness is not weakness, but a gentle strength that comes from humility.
- A meek person defers to God's will over his own and doesn't take matters into his own hands but trusts in God.



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- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—Matthew specifies that this is not physical hunger but spiritual hunger, a yearning for things to be right with the world.
- It is a hunger for God's justice, for God's will to be done.

A black and white image of a city skyline, including skyscrapers and a bridge, is shown upside down at the top of the page. The city is reflected in a white, cloud-like surface that separates it from the text below.

God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- Merciful—Mercy is one of the words God uses most often about Himself and refers to His eternal lovingkindness toward His people even though they kept being unfaithful to Him (Exodus 34:6–7).
- It is one of the things God required of His people (Micah 6:8). To love mercy is to act with love and compassion toward everyone by withholding judgment.

A black and white image of a city skyline, including skyscrapers and a bridge, oriented upside down at the top of the page.

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- Pure in heart—These are the ones who have been washed clean by Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- They have received a new heart, not stone (Ezekiel 36:26), a heart of unmixed devotion to God, who set their minds on godly things and long to do what is godly (Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:2).



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- Peacemakers—This was a term often used of emperors who tried to reconcile enemies with each other.
- It is peacemaking, not peacekeeping. It does not mean avoiding conflict, covering up hard things, or making unhealthy concessions to keep the peace, but doing the hard work of confronting the heart of the conflict and working through it to true reconciliation.



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- Persecuted—This was one of the ways Jesus was claiming His divinity. Typical rabbis asked their disciples to suffer for God's name, but not for their own.
- Not only were they not to fight back when they were persecuted on His account, they were to rejoice in it because it was for righteousness' sake.



God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

- This isn't what Jesus' Jewish audience expected from their Messiah.
- They believed the coming of the kingdom of God would bring a political revolution, not meekness, humility and persecution.
- It's also completely upside-down from what the world thinks of as "blessed."



Matthew 5:11-12

Even persecution is a blessing.

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Even persecution is a blessing

- In verses 11–12, Jesus continued talking about persecution, but now made it personal to His audience. Instead of just “blessed are the . . .” He said, “blessed are you.”
- The Beatitudes are all about humbling yourself and pursuing God’s kingdom as your life’s mission and His will instead of your own. Then we will be salt and light in the world.



Even persecution is a blessing

- Jesus said when His disciples are persecuted for His sake, they are to be glad because it puts them in good company with the prophets who were also persecuted for speaking God's Word when people didn't want to hear it.
- Jesus promised that those who are persecuted for God will be rewarded in heaven, which Jewish tradition also taught.



Even persecution is a blessing

- In the book of Acts, we see this perspective.
- After being flogged by the Sanhedrin for preaching about Jesus, the disciples left “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41).
- Just a couple of months before, they had run in fear for their lives when Jesus was arrested.



Even persecution is a blessing

- What happened during those two months to completely change their hearts and their attitudes? First, they saw Jesus raised from the dead.
- Then, they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then, they prayed that the Holy Spirit would give them a boldness to preach, no matter the cost to their lives (Acts 4:29–31).



Matthew 5:13-16

**When we live differently,
we show the world who God is.**

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When we live differently, we show the world who God is

- Salt: In the ancient world, salt was extremely important and had many uses. The most common uses were as a preservative and to flavor food.
- Jesus' point was that salt that has lost its saltiness is good for nothing. The phrase "lost its saltiness" literally means "becomes foolish or useless."



When we live differently, we show the world who God is

- In the same way, a disciple who has lost his “discipleness” is good for nothing.
- Jesus described what a disciple was – meek, merciful, pure in heart, etc.
- If those who claimed to follow Jesus did not exhibit these traits, they would be useless in His kingdom.



When we live differently, we show the world who God is

- What is even more significant about this metaphor is that salt is extremely stable and cannot lose its flavor.
- People knew this about salt even in the first century. Jesus intentionally used salt to describe an inconceivable situation.
- Salt cannot lose its saltiness. In the same way, a true disciple cannot lose his "discipleness."



When we live differently, we show the world who God is

- Light: Jesus made a similar point about light. A light is useless if you hide it under a basket. The purpose of light is to shine, to illuminate a whole house.
- The Beatitudes tell us how we change the world around us, turn the world upside-down, make it more like the upside-down kingdom of God in any way that we can.



When we live differently, we show the world who God is

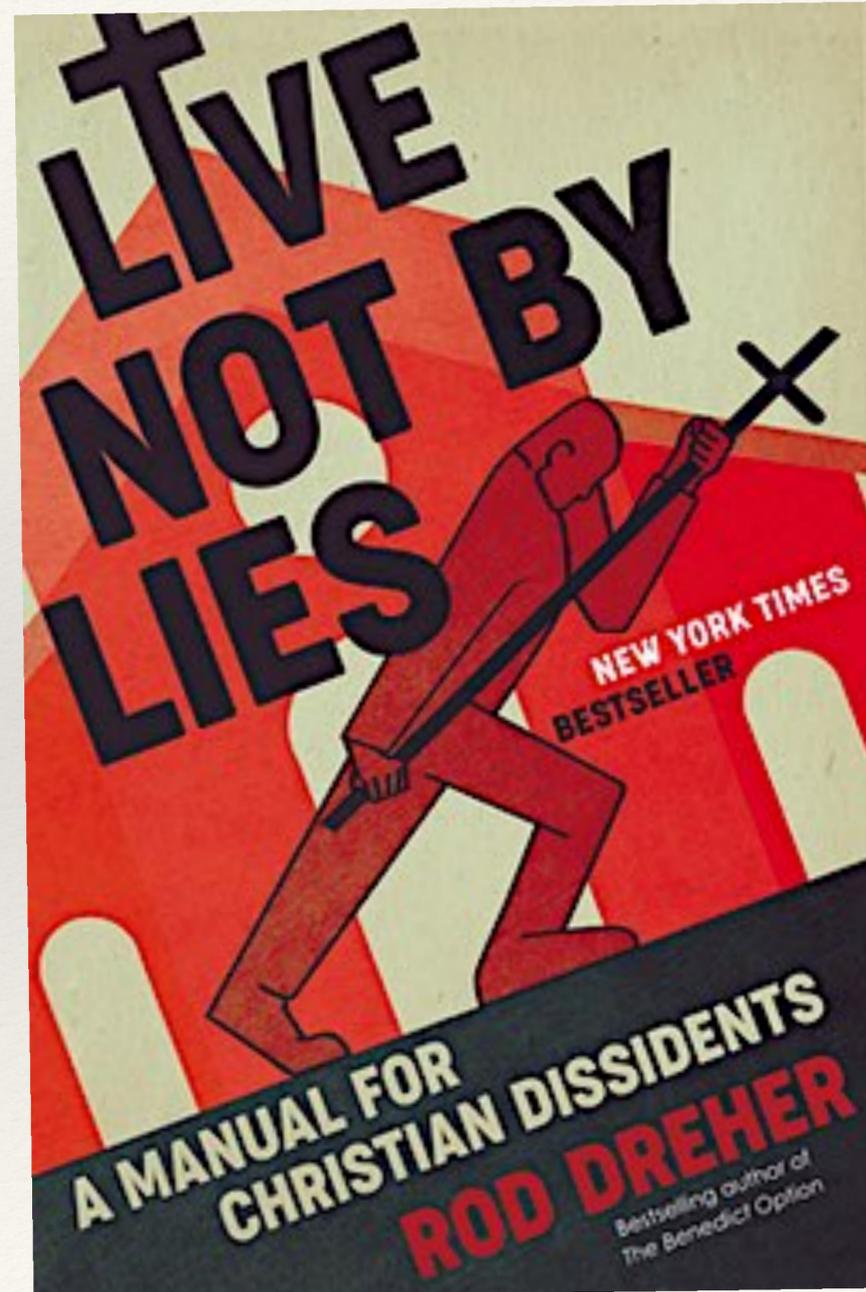
- The Old Testament had already talked about God's people being a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6), showing them how wise and compassionate and loving their God is by the way they lived when they followed His law (Deuteronomy 4:1–8).
- When they followed His law, other nations would see how different they were from the rest of the world.



When we live differently, we show the world who God is

- They would take notice and be attracted to the light. When Jesus' disciples live as the kingdom people described in the Beatitudes, they certainly stick out in this world.
- That is a good thing.
- They are showing the world how different God is from the way the rest of the world operates.

Persecution?



Soft Totalitarianism

- Rod Dreyer notes that over the past few years, America has seen the rise of a chilling “soft totalitarianism.”
- This is different from what we read in novels like *Brave New World* or in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
- The old, hard totalitarianism came from the state (Germany, Russia) and was dedicated to the eradication of Christianity.
- This new totalitarianism usually comes from the left in society but is also dedicated to the eradication of Christianity.

Soft Totalitarianism

- Today totalitarianism demands allegiance to a set of progressive beliefs.
- Compliance is forced less by the state than by elites who form public opinion, and by private corporations that control our lives through technology.
- It was easy to dismiss what was happening on campus and think, “wait until those kids get into the real world and have to find a job.”
- They did and brought their “wokeness” on the campus to the corporate world, to the legal world, to the media, and to the schools.

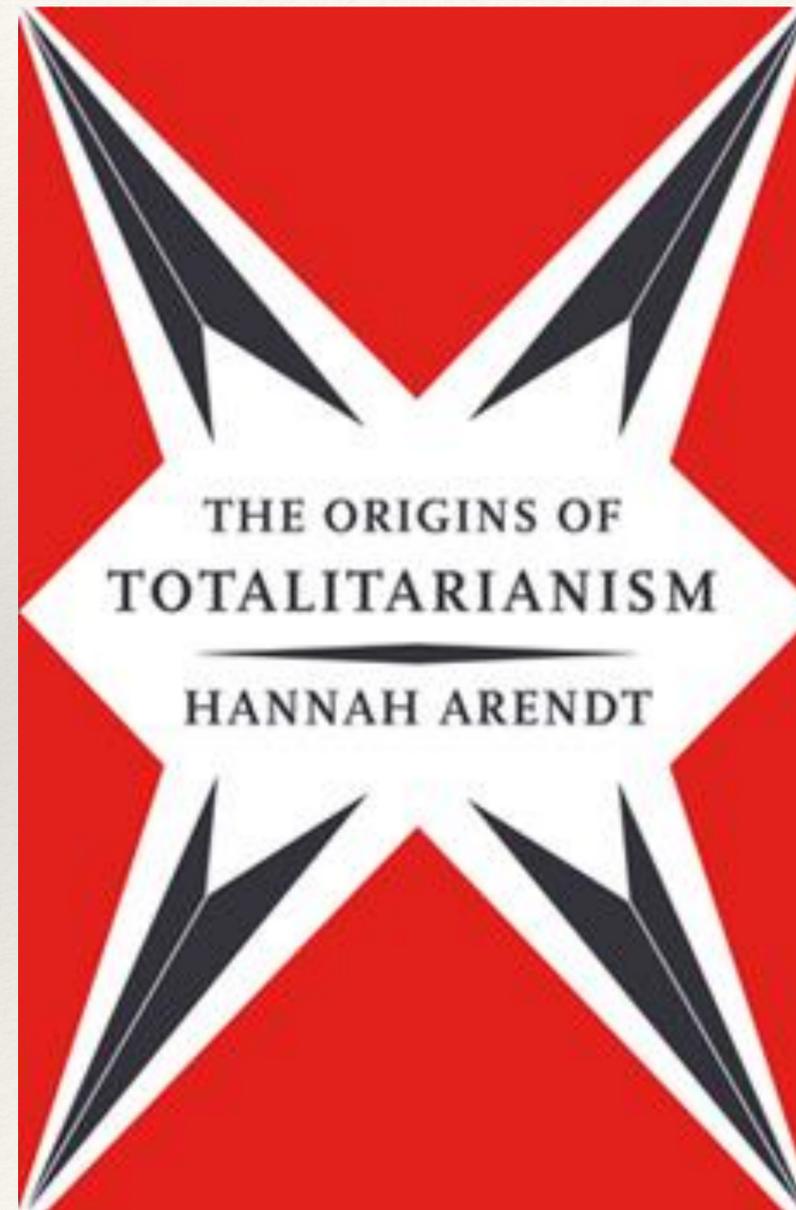
Soft Totalitarianism

- Today dissenters from the woke party line find their businesses, careers, and reputations destroyed.
- They are pushed out of the public square, stigmatized, canceled, and demonized as racists, sexists, homophobes, and the like.
- He has a chapter about woke capitalism - the first example was the corporate threat to Indiana when the state passed a “religious freedom restoration” bill.
- America runs on the Internet. Five companies (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Google) have incalculable influence.

Soft Totalitarianism

- His book is full of stories from Christians who endured hard totalitarianism and provide us with models for how to address this more insidious form of soft totalitarianism.
- His opening chapter is a story of a Jesuit priest and activist who fled Croatia and settled in Czechoslovakia in 1943 using the name Kolakoic.
- He had seen Nazi totalitarianism and believed that Soviet totalitarianism would come to these countries after World War II.
- He warned the Christians what was to come and prepared them.

How to See Totalitarianism Coming



How to See Totalitarianism Coming

- Loneliness and social atomization
- Losing faith in hierarchies and institutions
- The desire to transgress and destroy
- Propaganda and the willingness to believe useful lies
- A mania for ideology
- Society that values loyalty more than expertise

How to Live

- Value nothing more than truth
- Families are resistance cells
- Religion, the bedrock of resistance
- Standing in solidarity
- The gift of suffering
- “Live not by lies” (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn)

