

I. Introduction:

Look up the lyrics to John Lennon's "Imagine." You can even listen to it as a group. What do you think of Lennon's vision for the future? Which parts do you like? Which parts do you dislike?

Today we're going to start a study on the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is Matthew's summary of Jesus' teaching during his lifetime. The content of his preaching can be summarized in Matthew 4:17. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So, when Jesus preached on the mountain, he was preaching about what the kingdom of heaven would look like. Jesus was casting his vision for a future people of God that serve him. Jesus was saying, "Imagine if God's people..." and preaching a vision for the future.

II. Read the Story: Matthew 5 1:12

⁵ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

III. Engage the Story:

1. What does it mean to be "blessed" in Genesis 1:28 and/or Genesis 35:9-12?

2. Who is "blessed" in Psalm 1 or Proverbs 8:32-35?

3. Is Jesus' use of the word "blessed" similar or different or both when compared with the Old Testament passages above?

4. Do you see anything in common among all the different types of people who will be blessed?

5. Go through each of the different characteristics. What does each one of them mean? Are any of these characteristics actually good to have?

IV. Live the Story:

Jesus is casting a vision or dream for the future. But it's not just a dream. It's something that is imminent. God's kingdom is coming (Matt 4:17). He is drawing on the Old Testament's picture of "the good life" and saying that these broken people who want justice for the world, they're the ones who are going to get the "good life."

5. Jesus highlighted a lot of characteristics in his blessings. From what you know of the culture here in the Bay Area and American culture as a whole. Which characteristics would not fit? What about American Christians? Which of these characteristics exemplify American Christians and which do not?

6. For yourself, which characteristics fit with who you are? Which characteristics don't fit?