

# Ascending the Celestial Ladder: Drawing Near to Christ through the Beatitudes

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## Summary

### “Drawing Near” – Introduction to the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-2)

## Scripture References

Matthew 4:17; Matthew 5:1-2; Luke 19:10; Exodus 20; Matthew 18; John 11:35

## Introduction

The group launched a new series on the Beatitudes, limiting this session to the opening setting of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-2). Emphasis: understanding who Jesus is, why He chooses a mountain setting, and how disciples differ from “the crowd.” The Beatitudes will be treated as a “celestial ladder” (Spurgeon) that both humbles the flesh and elevates Kingdom citizens in sanctification.

## Key Points

- Jesus' first recorded sermon is the Sermon on the Mount; His earliest public cry was “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).
- The Beatitudes (first nine statements) set the trajectory for, and must shape the reading of, the whole sermon.
- Spurgeon's “ascending/descending ladder” :
  - Ascending = believer's sanctification toward Christlikeness.
  - Descending = humiliation and mortification of the flesh.
- Beatitudes mark sanctification, never a pathway to earn salvation (Eph 2 implied: by grace through faith).
- Verses 1-2 are not filler; they reveal Jesus' divinity, authority, benevolent love, and purpose.
- Crowd vs. Disciples: crowds stay at a distance; disciples intentionally draw near when Jesus sits to teach.
- Mountain imagery: unlike OT figures who climbed to meet God (Exodus 20, Genesis 28, etc.), the sinless Mediator ascends and invites disciples upward.
- Jesus sits—first-century posture of authoritative instruction.

## Theological / Exegetical Points

- Christ as Second Adam: He mediates between God and man by ascending, then teaching with divine authority.
- Parallel to Sinai: new, authoritative exposition of the Law ( “You have heard… but I say…” to follow).
- Topography as providence: natural amphitheater allows both separation (disciples approach) and inclusion (crowd still hears).
- Discipleship defined: intentional submission to Christ's authority through Word, prayer, and obedience.
- No arbitrary verses: even short statements ( “Jesus wept,” John 11:35) carry theological weight.

## Interaction & Group Responses

- Preparing to hear God:
  - Reduce distractions.
  - Play instrumental or worship music (e.g., Bach).
  - Begin reading with prayer, asking the Spirit for illumination.
  - Practise deliberate “call-to-worship” habits (head-bowing, silence, etc.).
- Accountability discussion: Matthew 18 church discipline seen as peacemaking, family strengthening, and Beatitude living.
- Crowd/Disciple distinction applied to Sunday gatherings: disciples come intent on learning; mere attendance does not equal faith.
- Members wrestled with when to correct doctrinal error. Agreed approach: ask for chapter & verse, respond in love, pursue follow-up if study is needed.

## Practical Applications

1. Adopt a weekly discipline to “draw near” (e.g., scheduled quiet time, pre-service music, written prayer).
2. Slow Bible reading—recognise no text is throw-away.
3. Evaluate church life against Beatitude traits; pursue mutual accountability.
4. When false teaching surfaces, respond graciously yet truthfully, seeking reconciliation.
5. Personal challenge issued: identify one concrete way to move closer to Christ this week.