

# The Beatitudes (1)

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[0:00] So, as we heard, we're starting in Matthew 3, and we see a story of John the Baptist. So Jesus was about 30 years old and had come from Galilee to be baptized by this John the Baptist, who by all accounts was a pretty outlandish person. He lived off locusts and wild honey and preached in the wilderness to everyone a baptism of repentance.

People went out to hear what he had to say, and he provided this space for them, a space to come to him and repent of their sins and be baptized, because as he said, the kingdom of heaven is coming near.

So in simple terms, what John is saying quite boldly is this. Everybody has this sin, and it needs to be dealt with. There's a big change that needs to happen. And at the beginning of this, there is the commitment to belong to the people of God by the confession of sins and with a repentant heart expressed in baptism.

This would have been quite counterintuitive for the Jews, because for them, belonging to God's people would have come about by lineage or birthright. So, this is quite a revolutionary thing. You look at chapter 3, verse 5. People went out to him from Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region of the Jordan. And the revolutionary factor is emphasized by his language when he encounters the religious leaders of the day in 3.7. As we see, John doesn't go for the polite technique of a handshake and a nice smile.

[1:58] He calls them a brood of vipers. And actually, he calls them out on their idea of salvation based on their lineage, which is the reference to Abraham. And the warning gets stronger when he refers to the consequences of this sin. So, in verse 8, he tells of the need to produce fruit in keeping with repentance, likening those who might be repenting to trees.

We then hear in verse 10, quite shocking, that the axe is already at the root of the trees. And if they fail to produce good fruit, they'll be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Quite a strong message, isn't it? So, John is saying that at a heart of repentance, that a heart of repentance, sorry, has to be there.

It also needs to be an ongoing thing. This isn't a touchscreen, and I keep wanting to scroll upwards. And so, as we read down, we see Jesus comes to be baptized.

What a challenging thought that is. One can only imagine how John must have felt at that point. So, Jesus comes to be baptized.

[3:29] John sees Jesus for who he is. The son of God, without sin. And acknowledges that Jesus needs no repentance. John falls under his authority, and he recognizes that, actually, it is himself that needs to be washed by Jesus.

Whereas Jesus came to him for baptism. As it says in the text, John tried to deter him, saying, I need to be baptized by you. And do you come to me?

As we read on, we see Jesus allows John to baptize him. It confirms everything John said in verse 11, about the coming of a person more powerful than himself.

A person that will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Because right after that, the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus, and God himself spoke, saying, This is my son, whom I love.

With him I am well pleased. God was pleased with him. Jesus is clearly without this sin that John is speaking of.

[4:44] That's confirmed in Hebrews 4.15. You don't have to go there, I'll read it for you. Which we looked at with Chris this morning. It says, We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

So this part of the gospel does a pretty good job of giving an outline of who Jesus is. Moving on, we see in Matthew 4, an overview of the activities of Jesus after this.

And we see that verse from Hebrews played out, as Jesus gets tested in the wilderness by the devil. Excuse me. We see him tested and goaded into performing miracles, including defying death. Of course, Jesus overcomes all this. As we said, he is without sin. Following that, Jesus had gone back to Galilee from the wilderness and began to teach something that will sound familiar.

The kingdom of heaven has come near. That's echoing exactly what we read from John in chapter 3, verse 2. Only the weight of this would be extremely significant, considering the events of the baptism.

[6:28] We spoke about how the heavy volumes of people were going to see John. I bet there was a large amount of talk and a large amount of gossip about the events that occurred that day, about Jesus.

So, in Matthew 4, 18, Jesus calls his first disciples, which we know to be Peter, Andrew, James, and John, not to be confused with John the Baptist.

This is covered here, and we know from the other Gospels, that go a little further in depth about the events around this time, that the next day, Philip and Nathaniel were following him also.

And the next picture we see is Jesus traveling through Galilee, doing what he had already been doing, teaching, proclaiming the goodness of the coming kingdom, healing every disease and sickness among the people.

I liked when I was reading that, it almost seemed like a footnote. Oh, you know, he healed every disease and sickness. What an outstanding thing that is. It's no wonder if you read verse 24, it says, the news about him spread all over Syria.

[7:45] People brought to him all who were ill, with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, that is the ten cities. Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him. Can you picture that?

So what we're seeing here, and what I want to get across, is the scale of the commotion that followed these things. Anybody even remotely near Jesus must have been totally shaken up with all these news and these stories.

someone that can heal anything. Anything. Can you imagine if that happened today? If there was someone in Churchill Square who could heal anything.

Look at how sick our society is today, in many ways. how much we're in need of that. And we're so connected now, I have little doubt that it wouldn't be a local commotion.

[8:59] It would be worldwide. We'd see it on YouTube, we'd see it on Facebook, we'd see it on Twitter. Everybody around the world would know. So this brings us to our main text, Matthew 5.

And this gives us a, it's given us a nice overview and an introduction to who Jesus is as a teacher. I'll just read the verses we'll be looking at today from Matthew 5.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them. He said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

So you might be wondering, why is it called the Beatitudes? I wondered this for a long time. It didn't make any sense to me. I thought it had something to do with an attitude of some kind.

[10:26] I suppose it does in many ways. But it's actually from a Latin word, *beati*, which means something approximating supreme blessings or happiness.

Supreme happiness, that is. I tend to lean more towards the blessedness in that side of things. So we look at the text and Jesus is teaching his disciples in front of a large, large numbers of people as we've already established.

As we read down the text, there's some pretty noticeable points. Firstly, you'll notice that the text is counterintuitive.

If you've ever experienced any of the things that are written here, your first reaction probably wouldn't be to associate them with feeling blessed.

So let's look at verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit. So our initial reaction, as was mine, was to think that it refers to feeling a bit unhappy.

[11:43] In fact, in Luke's gospel, it just says poor. Blessed are the poor. So it could be a bit confusing. But I don't think we're talking about money here either. Although there are things associated with being financially poor that we can look at.

Most importantly, need. People who are financially poor need. Need many things.

I don't know everybody's background, but I'm sure at least some of us have experienced in one way or another poverty of some kind. In 1993, when I was a small boy, I went with my family to a place called Jakarta, which is in Indonesia.

And we were stopped on the road in a taxi. And there was a little girl who suddenly appeared at the window next to me who was very filthy and dressed in rags and started singing.

She had a little wooden pot in her hand. And at the time, it seemed like the most beautiful sound you'd ever heard.

[12:58] Obviously, she sung a lot. But the taxi driver told us quite sternly not to give her money. It wouldn't be going to her anyway.

It would be going to the people that sent her out to beg. And then the next day, she would go out and do it again. So the money wouldn't help her in this case. So this girl was poor.

She was desperately in need of many, many things. I'll give you this as an example of the depth. Because 25 years later, giving away my age there, I can still recall the sound of that girl's voice perfectly.

So we respond to this poverty. When we look back at what was being offered by John the Baptist, it starts to make a little more sense.

Because we are spiritually needy. We are sinners and we need to be of a repentant heart. So, this isn't us when we're feeling a little down.

[14:13] this is something very crucial and it's very heavy and it needs to be dealt with. Because as we read, the axe is at the root of the tree.

If it was insignificant, the consequences wouldn't result in being cut down and thrown into the fire. In Luke 5, we see Simon Peter's response to his own sin.

He fell upon his knees and begged Jesus not to be near him. So the poor in spirit really isn't a light thing to behold.

It's a very, very weighty, very heavy thing. Move on to the next one.

Blessed are those who mourn. Firstly, I'll point out that the language that is used is far beyond any mere feeling.

[15:13] If you ask anybody that's lost anybody that they love, there's no words to describe the depth of that feeling. It's so strong that it never really goes away.

You learn to cope and you deal with it. So how is this a thing? Because we read, blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

How is it that what we consider to be an extremely negative aspect of being alive is suddenly valued here in the text?

In James, it's an instruction. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. That's James 4, 8-9, if you want to look it up. So why mourn? We need to mourn because our sin is the reason that a sinless Jesus suffered.

[16:36] 1 Peter 3, 18, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. We should be mourning.

We should be weeping.

Do we really feel the weight of it? I came out of work recently after having a conversation with someone and I was less than helpful to that person, I'm ashamed to say. Even worse than that, I caught myself being barely repentant. I went back to God in prayer later, not that I could correct anything that I said, but I did find that I could be very sorry for it. So we should be mourning our sin. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. I really struggled with this one.

The real meaning of meek, if you look it up on Google, it seems to always be connected to weakness or something like that. But to be meek is to be quiet, is to be gentle and not proud.

[17:45] In a sense, it's submissive, but not to be confused with weakness. Jesus here is quoting from Psalm 37, 11, which says, but the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

Once again, this is counterintuitive. In the world, if you want to get ahead according to the rules of man, you've got to be the opposite of these things. You've got to put yourself out there and be confident and step over your own mother to make a pound if you need to.

I wouldn't do that, mum, wherever you are. Once we recognise our sin, however, we need to take steps not to follow that direction.

Titus 3, 3 to 6, for we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of our God, our Saviour, appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

[19:13] this isn't optional, brothers and sisters. We need to be meek. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are they I've almost kicked that over several times.

I think I'll put it back where it was. So this verse seems to act of a summary of sorts of the previous three verses and what we've learned about our needs in the last two chapters.

So we have in those three verses a good outline of an emotional response to this sin. Verse three, we should acknowledge that this is us.

We are sinners and we are poor in spirit. Verse four, we should mourn our sin. The weight of our sin is not debatable.

[20:26] It's not trivial. Verse five, we should move forward in recognition of this. We can't live as slaves to our sin. So what we're seeing is I believe the beginning of a blueprint, a manifesto of a specific kind of people and that is the people of Christ.

we've read about characteristics that must be in place. We must hunger and thirst to be righteous, to be holy.

Which asks the question, how do we do that? Aside from everything we've just read, Romans three makes it pretty clear. but now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. So what we need to do is have faith.

[21:52] If you're a Christian and this is you, you're part of these people. This is your kingdom and you're blessed in all of these things beyond your wildest dreams.

which does leave one potential objection. How? We've gone over all the emotional states of mourning and being poor in spirit and all of these things and examples.

How are we blessed? If you're feeling the weight of sin which I urge you to do, you might not be feeling very blessed.

When we take another look at a text, we see a very, very important theme running through it and that's the fulfillment of this is delayed. The poor in spirit have the kingdom of heaven which is near. Those who mourn will be comforted. The meek will inherit the earth and if you thirst and hunger for real righteousness, you will be filled. I'd like to look at a little snapshot of what's been spoken about there from Revelation 7 15.

[23:16] Now I know I mention this nearly every time I speak but it is very, very, very relevant here. I promise you. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, not any scorching heat for the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. This is us by grace.

Another very good way of remembering grace is God's riches at Christ's expense. which is what we've seen tonight. So I want to be absolutely clear on our application for this tonight. If you're a Christian, feel the weight of your sin. You can know how disgusting it is. You can know how obscene and how displeasing it is because it will equip you all the more to go to our Lord in repentance and thankfulness knowing that he's taken all of that from you.