

Beatitudes (2)

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[0:00] Good evening. Quite a crowd. This is the second part of the Beatitudes. There must be one or two people here who weren't here last week. And for your benefit. Well, that's where we're going today in terms of an introduction and the particular we're doing the second half of what we read the four Beatitudes.

He's merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and being persecuted. That's where we're going. But I just wanted to slightly recap on where we got to last time as well.

That there are eight Beatitudes. This is part of the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples. Jesus withdrew when the crowds were following him, you recall. And it sets forth the character expected in his followers under the rule of God.

And last week, Aaron was dealing with the Christian's relation to God. And just quickly in there, recapping where we were, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

And just in the smallest recap, just see that there is a logical progression in some of these. You're poor in spirit because you feel you can't offer God anything.

[1:19] So you're on your knees. You mourn over your own sin. You mourn that as you look around you, God's law is not obeyed. Many of us know that lovely verse in Psalm 119. Tears flow because your law is not obeyed. Not just your own sin, but there's this poverty of spirit and mourning.

And of course, that makes you meek. You see the progression that maybe other times, that's a sort of gentleness towards others. Even if others are wronging you, you're not first to judge them. But you're more able to say, well, they're a sinner.

And I've been helped by God. Maybe they're not been helped yet. So I have a slightly softer attitude to those who are harming. And the hunger and thirsting for righteousness. Just worth remembering, of course, we hunger and thirst for food and drink every day.

It happens automatically. What a lovely picture that just automatically we are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. And the blessings that come from that, you are in the kingdom of heaven. You're comforted if you mourn.

And you're given the land, the earth, if you are the meek. And you are filled if you hunger and thirst for righteousness. So this week, we're looking at the next four Beatitudes, which relate to the Christian, the Christian's relation to others.

[2:41] And I just want to give a little bit of context. Aaron was very helpful last week. We looked through chapter four and we saw that Jesus had started his ministry. He was very popular and drawing a crowd. He was healing many.

And John the Baptist had just been before him saying the kingdom of God is coming. And of course, you can imagine everyone getting very excited. They think that Jesus is going to overthrow the Romans and everything like this.

That was possibly in their minds. And this, broadly, we're going to find out this Sermon on the Mount. It's a rather different message that they were going to get. But just keeping in the New Testament first, we'll go back to some of the Old Testament background.

So chapter four was going through that with Jesus. But in Matthew 6 and verse 8, there is almost a punchline in the middle of the whole Sermon on the Mount.

Do not be like them. And we'll see that this is repeated when we come to some Old Testament context as well. Do not be like them is almost the punchline of this Sermon on the Mount because we are different.

[3:53] And keep in mind, although we won't look at them much, that there are, in contrast to the Sermon on the Mount, there are seven woes in Matthew 23. I'll give you an example of one of them, which is, you know, you clean the outside of the cup, but inside it is dirty.

That was, you know, how he had been very angry with the Pharisees. But in contrast to these blessings for good qualities of character under the rule of God, there are woes that you can contrast as well.

Old Testament context. In Leviticus and verse, sorry, Leviticus chapter 18. Remember the time when God's people were coming out and being given, of Egypt, and being given the promised land. And they were told, obey God and it will go well with you if you disobey, it will be bad for you. But they were specifically also said, do not do, you know, do not get involved with the other nations. Do not do as they do. So you see the common theme of that with, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, do not be like them. Do not do as they do. The Old Testament people were told to do.

[5:04] And of course they didn't get it right, did they? They got well muddled up and took on the gods of the nations around them. And remember also the people in exile.

When we went over some of those things, those who mourn. Imagine the people who had been removed from their land because of God's judgment. They'd lost their home.

God had chastised them. That's an important idea to think about. People who had been taught a lesson and God is saying, blessed are those who mourn. And you can keep those people in mind as well.

But there is a passage in Isaiah 61. And you might have looked it up, but I'm helping by putting it up in front of you. And this is also an important background to the Sermon on the Mount.

This is Isaiah the prophet talking about the Messiah who would come, prophesying that he would bring good news to the poor, bind up broken hearted, release from dunk, comfort all who mourn.

[6:10] You've seen so many of these things or things like them in the Beatitudes that we've read. So this is all promised about the Messiah that would come. And these qualities and blessings are not, they are spiritual and not physical.

And if you've got Matthew 5 open, you can see that in verses 3 and 8 in particular. We talked about being poor in spirit and in what we're looking at today, pure in heart.

That is fundamentally what they are. And of course, if you weren't completely sure by that, in John 18 and verse 36, Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world. So don't forget going back to all those people who were excited that this Messiah is going to change everything and the Romans are going to be overthrown.

Jesus is saying, My kingdom is not of this world. Something in here. Something in here.

And when are these blessings to be enjoyed? Well, in most cases, there is a measure starting now and the fullness of them is in the future.

[7:45] Certainly in verses 3 and 10, the language is for theirs is and the middle ones for they will be. They sound like future, but some of those, clearly some of the benefits do start now.

What does the word blessed mean? There is a Greek word that's a little bit above my pay grade, but there is one meaning which is rather obvious and translated by some, that it means happy. Truly happy. So that if you exhibit these qualities of character, God is saying you will be truly happy. But there is also a rather objective thing is that whether you feel it or not, God is saying they are blessed.

So it's not just whether you feel it or not. And when it comes to some of the later ones, you probably noticed in what we read, persecuted for righteousness. Yeah, blessed are you? Well, we'll have to come to that one, won't we?

So the first one, blessed are the merciful. And I found this helpful quote just reading around things. And remember how these things build on the Beatitudes that have gone before.

[8:59] Let me just read this. One thing that is common to the poor in spirit, the meek and those who hunger for righteousness, is that their life is not self-sufficient but looks outward for help.

They understand mercy for they know their own inadequacies. And when they receive grace and mercy from the king, they in turn know how to show mercy to others.

And that includes both the forgiveness of the sinner and compassion for the suffering and the needy. They are called blessed because they place showing mercy above their own rights.

It is not that they are merciful by nature but because they have been shown mercy and live in constant dependence on the Lord. Isn't that a lovely way of summing it up?

And for those of you who remember when John was doing something on the Lord's Prayer, isn't this a similar thought? Blessed are the merciful. The next slide, I'm slightly out of sequence.

[10:00] For they will be shown mercy. Similar, isn't it, to the Lord's Prayer. If you forgive others their sins, the Father will forgive you. Of course, that doesn't mean if you do this, then you get that.

The whole idea from what we've read in that quote is that because you've been shown mercy and experienced it, you naturally give it out. By naturally giving it out, you show that you've understood. And it's the same with forgiveness. You have been forgiven much and you show it by being more able to forgive others. It's not like you start with forgiving others. It can't work like that.

So it's compassion for people in need. There's some of the Greek words for the people who like and understand them a bit better than me. And it includes being willing to forgive others.

And we've recently, in some of our meetings, I think Phil was on a prayer meeting, we were looking at the parable of the unmerciful servant. And how interesting, I won't turn it up and read it all, but there's the master who calls in someone, you owe me 10,000 bags of gold, and he cancels that.

[11:16] And then that person goes away and finds someone else who owns him a comparatively small sum, 100 silver coins, and he was unmerciful. And actually, the end of that passage is a severe chastisement, severe punishment for this person who had clearly not understood mercy.

He had not understood. And so he was... Teeth and other language like that is in the language. And some lovely verses, favourite verses of mine, in fact, when we visit our daughter, these act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly are phrases that she's picked out and put on her wall.

But of course, it just... This is in the Old Testament in Micah. He has shown you, O man, what is good to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Lovely words.

So, blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. And of course, what are we thinking of? How does this apply? Well, there is a day of judgment coming. Matthew 12, verses 36 and 37, it says, Everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they've spoken.

[12:37] For by your words you'll be acquitted, and by your words you'll be condemned. The Christian trusts in the power of Christ's death to forgive our sins, because we have been shown mercy, we're able to show it.

You get the sort of flow of this. But just think ahead. If we have been shown mercy and can show that we've understood that by showing mercy to others, ultimately when God is saying that the blessing of this beatitude, for they will be shown mercy, we have no fear when we come to that judgment day.

So I think that's the first one. Blessed are the merciful. Let me just go back. I mean, it's always worth, just before we go on to the next one, can you think for yourself, are you merciful?

Naturally? Or having been a believer for a while, are you learning to be merciful because you've been forgiven much? Are you naturally, well, learning by God's grace to show more mercy?

And it's not always little things, like someone's irritated in your kind. And sometimes it's reaching out to people in need, how God loves to champion the cause of the widows and the orphans, and that we actually, in a long-term way, want to reach out and relieve people who are in need.

[14:08] Not just when we've seen images of the suffering children and we just think we'll pay a little sum, but wanting to show mercy. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mercy. Number two, in this second batch of four, blessed are the pure in heart. And the text confirms this is an outward thing.

Part of the idea is it's in your mind, emotions and will. Many of you will know the heart is described in the Bible as the place where the deep part of you, it's not just your mind, it's where everything comes together, your emotions and your will.

It carries the idea of being cleansed of impurity there. But there is an added meaning to this word, which is about unmixed emotions.

It's about being single-minded, utterly sincere. Now there's a different sort of challenge, not just the trying to think of the list of things that I want to make sure I'm not impure, but when you're pulled in this way and that, are you single-minded and utterly sincere?

[15:24] It has this rather searching idea, really, that the whole of your life, whether it's the private part or the public part, is transparent and transparent before God and men.

What a searching idea. I mean, how many of us really would like, if, you know, on the screen, all your thoughts all week could be on public view, we would all be cringing and worried, but this is an idea that what you are like in private, you are the same in public, pure, single-minded, utterly sincere.

What a challenge, but what a reminder of how God is like this. Blessed are the pure in heart.

Can't just try harder, can you? There is behind this the need for a new heart. I think most of us here probably are Christians this evening, but if you're not, you know, you think, come on, be serious, how can I do this?

You need a new heart, but there are lovely verses that remind us that God does give a new heart. Back in Ezekiel, it was promised, I will give them an undivided heart.

[16:40] How close that is to the meaning of this word, pure. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them. I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

And in the New Testament, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone, the new is here. Go back on that.

So there is this idea that the spirit of God has come. It gives you a new heart. This business is starting in the Christian walk. If you're thinking for a moment, I'm doing this all on my own.

God is, when we repent and come to him, God gives us his spirit and so we're not trying to work this all out in our own strength. But although the spirit is there to assist and he's the one that drives it, nevertheless, there is action for us to take.

You remember many of us on the church weekend we were going through Colossians and a very helpful message that we were being brought was about identifying and putting to death things that are in your way and it's worth taking time, isn't it?

[17:54] What are the particular things that you know in your life? You've just got to say, come on, this is happening too often. I want to get rid of these things. So there's the pure in heart.

Again, a very challenging idea. Are you single-minded, undivided in your heart? Do you really want to give yourself to Christ and all that he wants you to do or are there really lots of pulls in another direction?

Are you, you know, if nothing else it's worth finding friends to pray. It's lovely to know some groups of friends that share and pray together about some of these things. An undivided heart.

And dealing with impurities, how important that is just to see how to deal with those. For they will see God, what is the promise for this one?

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. What could that mean? What could that mean? Well, Moses was interested in seeing God, wasn't he?

[19:01] He said, show me your glory, this is in Exodus 33. And what was the response at the time from God? He said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live, because that was how pure and holy God was.

But he said, when my glory passes by, I'll put you in the cleft of a rock. And so it went on that God passed by and he was allowed to see his back, but not his face.

So there's one context of what it might be like to see God. Just a second point, I think many of us who have been walking with God for some years.

Surely some of the meaning of this, seeing God, is just a bit more, you see him in more of the things in the world. Now it could be as simple as when you look at beautiful creation, a forest, a beautiful landscape, and you always knew it was kind of nice, but then when you really know God, these things, his handiwork is on show here.

And what about all the things that happen in life that you see one time you just thought there was no rhyme or reason in it, but you are more aware, you actually see God in things.

[20:15] It's at least part of the meaning. And of course in the future, there are some words from Job here, I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

Just paraphrasing a little bit in the middle after death, I myself will see him and how my heart yearns within me. So blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers. And again, we're not going through exactly how the logic works on the ones before, but how, if you can sum up by realizing that when you've become aware of sin in some of the early ones and you've had that wrestling match in your head and your heart, and God has made a peace in you, then you are more equipped to be a peacemaker.

Some verses in Isaiah, talking about the Messiah to come, in Isaiah 9 he will be called the Prince of Peace, and of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

Colossians 1 and verse 20 this is the same verb for peace and through Christ to reconcile to himself all things by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

[21:50] Not quite with the same authority but a lovely song that I like, I'm quite fond of Casting Crowns who are a music, a Christian worship group, but there's a lovely line in this song, Who Am I, Who Am I is the name of the song, Who Am I that the voice that calmed the sea would call out through the rain and calm the storm in me.

And it just made me think that there is that time when everything was very chaotic in me, peace, guilty over sin, but God has calmed the storm in me, deep in my soul.

You can probably be identifying with just the same thing. And if at that deep level of being right with God, that storm has been calmed, you can see that you are going to be more able to be a peacemaker.

What are the qualities of a peacemaker? Well, on a very practical level, it doesn't come out of immediately the verses in front of us, but one just bit of practical wisdom is knowing when not to speak.

And how many of us are good at knowing when not to speak. How sometimes we can aggravate situations just because something's on our mind and we say it and someone might say, why did you say that?

[23:11] Oh, it's true. Oh, well, is that enough? Did it need to be said? Was it encouraging? Did it promote peace? So, there is wisdom and there are other verses, aren't there, in the Bible about being slow to speak?

Well, actually it's in this one, isn't it? Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. And we've touched on having a deep peace in ourselves.

These are not people who have their own agenda, peacemakers. They've been shown it and it fits in with this sequence as we've touched on, not quarrelsome.

So, blessed are the peacemakers. And ultimately, I think there is a side of this that makes you think of the gospel going out, fundamentally. I don't think this is in the main that you're out there making peace between nations.

It can have some spin-off on that, but this is to do with individuals having peace with God first. So, blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

[24:20] Many of you will know that verse in John 1. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, born of God.

You skim past it, don't you? Children of God, this mighty, majestic God who dwells in heaven. And the thought that we are children, what does that suddenly mean? That we're deeply loved, that we're heirs, and that what he has, he wants to share with us.

What a rich and lovely thought. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. And then this is a difficult one, isn't it?

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. Does that make any sense to you? It does.

Blessed are those who are persecuted. That doesn't sound much fun, does it? Now, the only thing we can do is look at the text and say, well, this is not those who are persecuted for all kinds of other reasons, religious or political, because they're fanatical, because they're rude.

[25:36] There are plenty of people out there in the world who get persecuted just for being a bit awkward. Don't think this is on about that. This is talking about being persecuted because of righteousness.

You don't seek this, but it does come from a clash of very different value systems. And we only have to look at John the Baptist and Jesus to see people who stood out for what was good and said the kingdom was coming.

And you think for a moment, all these lovely qualities, who could say, boo to a goose, and wouldn't everyone just welcome and love it? Yeah? But what happened to John the Baptist?

He had his head chopped off. What happened to Jesus? He was killed. But you see, there's a light and a beauty and a humility in these godly people.

But just because there is a clash, I think we will touch on this again when we come to light, but it's like light is shining. Some are drawn to it, but others whose deeds are evil, they just hide away.

[26:47] And they don't like people who are shining their light. So these persecutors find distasteful the righteousness for which we hunger and thirst, and they have rejected the Christ we seek to follow.

And it goes on in verse 11, because this particular beatitude, verse 10 says, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. And we'll come to the, for those is the kingdom of heaven.

But then in verse 11, it's expanded. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Because of righteousness, because of me. rejoice and be glad. Now this is getting a bit hard, isn't it? Rejoice and be glad in your persecution because great is your reward in heaven.

But if you have understood that this kingdom is not of this world, that this is a heart that is being prepared for an eternity with God, then if because you are like God, the world doesn't like you, and just because of that, not because you're rude and other things, you suffer for it, well, rejoice and be glad because in that longer term thing, great will be your reward in heaven.

[28:19] And there is an example in Acts 5, and I'm sure you know this, after being flogged, the apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing, because they had been counted worthy of suffering, disgrace for the name.

What were they doing? Just telling the good news of Jesus because they couldn't keep their mouths shut, saying how good it was. Flogged, but counted worthy, rejoicing because they counted worthy of suffering.

So, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. blessing stated here for those who suffer such persecution is that this world, is that their destiny will be a complete contrast to their present humiliation.

That's the bit we're trying to say that you see the difference. Disciples, of course, know that that is something worth dying for.

But this is not just about the future, and some of it does come in now. And the blessing, you notice how this parallels the first one, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[29:31] And here we are at the end, nearly the end. Blessed are those who are persecuted, and for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It brackets it around.

So, we've gone through those four. I've just got some other bits nearly done. Beatitudes in general, there is a logical progression. A lovely quote I found here from Bonhoeffer, that with every beatitude the gulf is widened between the disciples and the people, and their call to come forth from the people becomes increasingly manifest.

Do not be like them, you know, is the headline. And we've touched on these rich blessings that we have when we display this character. Kingdom of heaven, comfort if you mourn, the land for the meek, being filled, shown mercy, the seeing God, made heirs.

What lovely blessings. And here's just a useful quote. I found this in a book by John Stott. The ways of the God of Scripture appear topsy-turvy to men, for God exalts the humble and abases the proud, calls the first last and the last first, scribes greatness to the servant, sends the rich away empty handed, and declares the meek to be his heirs.

The culture of the world and the counterculture of Christ are at loggerheads with each other. In brief, Jesus congratulates those who the world most pities, and he calls the world's rejects blessed.

[31:08] And then just to finish, we have got to do, so I'm not quite so nearly finished, we've got salt and light to deal with. So if that was about the Christian in relation to others, this is about the Christian's influence for good in the world.

It's worth asking a question, isn't it? When you think of those things that we've just been talking about, would you really expect to be able to have a strong impact on an evil world by exhibiting all these qualities?

Would you expect? Not really, would you? But Jesus thought that you would. Jesus thought you would.

He said, in these last parts, verses 13 onwards, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. So we've got to think about this for a moment.

Let's talk about salt. We know it gives flavour. In Old Testament times, an opportunity for someone to answer, what else does salt do in Old Testament?

[32:19] Preservative, indeed. We don't use it very much, but there are some South Africans among us who will know some of the reasons that built on. We'll come to that in a minute. It's useful in that.

So it's a preservative as well as something that gives flavour. Can salt lose its saltiness? Going back to the text, you are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

It's no longer good for anything apart from being thrown out. Can salt lose its saltiness? Well, I think the main, I'm not a chemist, but from little things I've read, it can become contaminated.

Salt can, that's the main problem, it can become contaminated. And there is a story told about the white stuff that was sometimes found around the Dead Sea.

Yes, it probably started as salt, but plus a lot of other things. And when water has washed it out, actually the sodium chloride bit goes, and all that's left is a sort of white powder that people called salt, but actually it had no taste, it had no effect, and it was only really fit for being thrown out.

[33:39] So there's some context of what salt losing its saltiness can be. And if you know nothing about biltong, it's a cured meat, I'll get this all wrong here, South African biltong, you cut it to size, you rub it well with salt, coarse salt.

And I understand if you do it all properly, it'll never go off really, it'll go on forever. Well, not ever, but I don't know, but it really, you rub this salt in and it really does preserve.

It's a cured meat. It's a cured meat. Sorry about that, it's in code. So what is this about?

You are the salt of the earth, Jesus said. Well, we are set in the world to hinder the process of social decay, like salt stops meat and other, you know, going bad.

You can see what the idea is here. Just by being who we are, we are to hinder the process of decay in our society. It's quite a challenge.

[34:48] To be effective, we need to be free of impurities. That's a theme we've been touching on in some of these other Beatitudes. So the salt is not going to do much good if it's got impurities.

Are we free of impurities individually as a church? And the other one that's quite practical, isn't it? It's not much use if it's piled up on the side of a plate.

That's the idea of Christians who only spend time with Christians. It's quite good to get out there, isn't it, and show your life to others. So you are the salt of the earth.

Challenge is there to think about. Challenge is about touching again on the idea of purity and not, and being out there rubbed into the meat, mingling with the world.

world. And the second one, in verse 14, you are the light of the world. And I, I mean, Jesus also said, I am the light of the world, didn't he?

[35:55] But there's this one Peter tells us, well-known verses, you're chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his light.

You are the light of the world. Well, and the challenge in these verses is to let your light shine. Because, of course, what you can do is you can have a light on the head and you can cover it so no one can see it.

Let your light shine, and it tells us what it means, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. And we did touch earlier, didn't we, think about this.

When Christian people are like a light, you think everyone's going to be drawn to you, because you're exhibiting all these lovely qualities, but just like we said earlier, some, of course, will hate it. Their ways are evil, and they will not like the light, and that's where we get the link back into persecution. But just be, don't go in the idea of being glad you're being persecuted, unless it is just because you are exhibiting all these gracious and humble and godly qualities.

[37:12] So that was the effect of this light on others. It doesn't always draw people. It sometimes makes people turn away and be angry with you. Both salt and light, each of these affirmations begins in the Greek sentence as an emphatic pronoun.

man. So instead of just saying you are the salt of the earth, it really, you could spell it out, you and only you are. Yeah? You and only you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

So we must not fail, because there isn't a plan B. This is how God wants to do it. It. So this is my last slide building up.

Glimpses of holiness this evening. Do you feel comfortable with these qualities, the demands of having a pure heart, being merciful, being a peacemaker, being happy to be persecuted for righteousness?

How will you react to these qualities? Can I just ask, suggest that you, we together just marvel a little at the beauty of the life under the rule of God, remembering all of these together.

[38:31] The beautiful picture of the godly character, how beautiful it is. The challenge not to gloss over sinful thoughts and ways, to mourn and to put them to death.

If you're not a Christian, it starts here. That you, you know, be grateful if you are feeling a heavy heart because you know your sin is weighing on you. Be grateful.

Don't run away from it. Stay with it. Mourn. Because God will comfort those who mourn. He will come to them. And if you are a Christian, continue in these ways.

Don't take lightly the sin. Don't gloss over sinful thoughts and ways. Remember, though, that although there are things we put off, as a Christian, this isn't all down to you because you've got the Holy Spirit.

Bathe in his grace and mercy deeply that you may show it to others. And remember that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

[39:37] So the Holy Spirit is there to help. He's the one who's determined to get you through this process. He will bring it to completion. Be what you are.

That's it. Thank you.