

The Blessed Ones

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Megan Doxon.

And I'm part of the Thursday Night North Berkeley Community Group and Women Reading Women. Our reading today is from the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1 through 16 and 43 through 48 as printed in your liturgy.

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.

[1 : 24] Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst, for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you, for they will be called the Lord.

Blessed are those who are trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.

Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

[2 : 50] You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise you, O Christ. Thank you, Megan. And good morning.

These next three weeks, we are going to be exploring parts of the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon that's ever been preached. You can read it in about ten minutes or so.

[3 : 50] And some of you may think, if only the sermons at Christchurch were so short. But this is, of course, the summary of Jesus' prolonged periods of instruction to his disciples.

And I first had my adult encounter with the Sermon on the Mount about 23 years ago when I was in college. And I read a book by Martin Lloyd-Jones.

It was 60 sermons that he preached on the Sermon on the Mount just after World War II in London.

And I found in his sermons on this sermon a Jesus that I never knew.

And some of you I know are here. You're exploring Christianity, investigating who Jesus is. Others of you are here trying to learn what it means to follow Jesus in the context of a disciple-making community.

And I could think of nothing better for you to spend time reading than the studies in the Sermon on the Mount by Martin Lloyd-Jones. But why should we study the Sermon on the Mount?

[4 : 54] Why might some of us even commit this to memory? If you look at verse 1, it says that 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. And we should instinctively think back to what happened when Moses went up Mount Sinai. The Word of God came to the people of God. Those ten life-giving words, the ten commandments, the rest of the Torah was given to Moses. There on that mountain, the place of revelation, there God showed his mind, his heart, his will to his people.

And here is Jesus now up on this mountain standing in the place of God, ready to give the Magna Carta, ready to give the charter of what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a disciple and to live in the kingdom of God.

And we should remember that Jesus is preaching to Peter, Andrew, James, John, all these others that he's going to send out as apostles. And he's beginning this gospel, telling them what they're to be and what they're to go and do.

[6 : 03] And he gets to the end of this gospel in Matthew 28 and the resurrected Jesus gives them this mission. He says, I want you to go now and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And what? Teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And this Sermon on the Mount pretty much sums up everything that Jesus taught us and everything that he commanded us, everything he wants us to do.

And that's what the apostles are to go out and to teach. And this is what Christians and churches everywhere are to learn and to live and to obey. The Sermon on the Mount is a perfect picture of life in the kingdom of God.

And nothing shows us our absolute need for the new birth, for the Holy Spirit to come down and work within us, than trying to live out the Sermon on the Mount.

If you try to live out the Sermon on the Mount in your own strength and with your own resources, you are going to be crushed. You will very quickly be undone and begin to despair.

[7 : 13] Like verse 44, for example. What does it say? It says, I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Who can do that? This will drive you to see your need to be born from above with a new life from God that can enable you to do this.

The gospel, God's grace, the operation of the Holy Spirit working on you from the inside out. That's what a Christian is. It's a person who's experienced the grace of Jesus Christ and his cross.

Somebody who's been given a new nature by the Holy Spirit to begin living and practicing the Sermon on the Mount in an alternative kingdom, with an alternative king.

And this, I think, is what the world today is so desperately looking for and so desperately in need of. It's just to see some true Christians, true churches who are living like this.

We don't need a strategy for evangelizing our neighbors. We just need to live the Sermon on the Mount. Can you imagine what would happen if all Christians in the East Bay were living the Sermon on the Mount?

[8 : 27] There would be a revival, right? There would be spiritual awakening. People would look at us and say, what is the secret to what you've got going on here?

Where are you getting this love? Where is this joy and this hope and this life and this power coming from? It would be amazing. It would be amazing.

So that's why we should study the Sermon on the Mount. But if the Sermon on the Mount is the symphony, the Beatitudes are the overture to the symphony.

And each of these really deserves a sermon of its own. And I'm just going to attempt very feebly to give you my sense of the whole of the Beatitudes here. They're the lenses for which you interpret the rest of the sermon.

So you guys ready for the Beatitudes? Or at least my feeble attempt at the Beatitudes? Jesus says in the Beatitudes that he fills the empty, he pours out the full, and he rejoices in rejection.

[9 : 31] That Jesus fills the empty, he pours out the full, and he rejoices in rejection. First of all, Jesus fills the empty. The Sermon on the Mount really defines the character of a Christian, but you notice that it opens with words of grace.

It begins not with demands, but with, what? Blessings. And the Son of God comes and he blesses people who know that they're broken. These first four Beatitudes are not for people who feel terrific. It's for people who feel miserable. People who feel their need and their lack in a sense that they are empty of the usual requirements for the blessed and abundant life.

Those who are poor in spirit. Those who are poor in joy. Those who are poor in power. Those who are poor in righteousness. It's so easy to misread these first four Beatitudes as praiseworthy virtues when really it's the exact opposite.

Jesus is coming to us and he's saying, God bless you who feel far from virtuous. If you've reached the bottom. If you know that you're helpless without God's supernatural help.

[10:47] If you wonder whether or not God even knows you, cares you, loves you, and accepts you. Then Jesus says, the kingdom that I bring and the blessings that I bring are precisely for you.

They're for you. And so he begins, blessings on you who are spiritually impoverished. Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

If you feel your spiritual and moral bankruptcy before the glory and the holiness of God. If you know that you're a sinner who deserves absolutely nothing from God but judgment.

If you know that you have nothing to offer him in exchange for salvation. And that there's nothing you can give to buy the favor of heaven. And that there's no contribution you could make so that God would love you more.

Then you're blessed. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Jesus illustrates this beautifully with a parable. He says, two men went up to the temple to pray.

[11:54] One a Pharisee. The other a tax collector. And the Pharisee stood by himself and he prayed, God, I thank you that I'm not like all these other people. Robbers. And the Pharisee stood by himself and he said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

In one of our hymns we say, nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress.

Helpless look to thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die. That's what it means to be poor in spirit.

Have you come to terms with your spiritual inadequacy before God? Because that's where it all begins. Right?

The Sermon on the Mount is going to climb up to the very heights of Mount Everest. But it begins right down here where we all live in Death Valley. And it's really this first, you can't even understand the rest of the Beatitudes without this first key that unlocks the rest.

[13:12] Because it says, we cannot be filled unless we are first empty. I mean, how can I, if I'm full of a prideful spirit, how can I be full of the Holy Spirit?

If my life is marked by self-reliance and self-confidence and self-expression and self-assertion and I think, oh, I'll go out and live the Sermon on the Mount in and of myself and my own strength and my own resources.

Doesn't Jesus first have to come to me and condemn me before he can release me? Doesn't he have to first convict me before he can convert me and say, you're so much more poor than you even realize?

Jesus is saying, look, no prideful person can enter the kingdom of God. It's a small gate. It's a very narrow road.

It's humility. It's poverty of spirit that causes us to enter in. It's someone who says, I really need a Savior. And I know that salvation is a completely undeserved gift of God.

[14:23] And if by faith we receive that gift, then Jesus says, yours is the kingdom of God. You've come to live under the rule and the reign of a totally different king now.

Blessings on you if you're spiritually impoverished. And Jesus goes on. He says, blessings on you who are poor in joy and in power. Right? Verse 4, he says, blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.

And this is not necessarily those who are bereaved. But it's rather those who grieve with tears over their loss of innocence, their loss of righteousness, their loss of self-respect because of sin.

Blessed are you if you know that your self-interest keeps you from loving God with all your heart and loving other people as yourself. If you get to the end of your day and you go back and you review and say, what was I thinking?

What was I saying? What was I doing? You, in utter helplessness and hopelessness, cry out like the apostle Peter cried out to Jesus. He said, depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.

[15:36] You say with the apostle Paul, oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death? And you begin to mourn.

And this godly sorrow leads to a repentance. Right? It's a sorrow that drives you to seek the only comfort that is on offer to us, which is the comfort of the forgiveness of almighty God through the death of his beloved son, Jesus.

And then Jesus says, blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. And you'll notice this just gets increasingly difficult. We're only on the third verse. And it's harder and harder and harder.

It's one thing for me to humble myself before God and to say, God, I'm a miserable sinner. But it's much harder for me to allow you to think of me as a miserable sinner.

Right? In my pride, I resent other people seeing me in my weakness and in my inability. But meekness is to have a true estimate of myself.

[16 : 45] And therefore, to have a humble attitude before other people. Right? I see myself for who I am. Therefore, I no longer have to protect myself.

And I can think of myself in the lowly status that I actually have. And in that place, I can be content. And I can be teachable. And Jesus says, if that's you, yours is the earth.

You're going to rule the earth with the earth's rightful king, Jesus. Blessings on you if you're spiritually impoverished. Blessings on you who are poor in joy and poor in power.

And blessings on you who are poor in righteousness. Right? Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness because they will be filled. This is the person who says, you know what? I'm not right in myself. And even when I'm at my best, the very best righteousness I can produce is filthy rags. Right? The Apostle Paul looked at all of his righteousness and he said, it's dung.

[17 : 48] It's refuse. What I really need is a right relationship with God. This is what the psalmist is saying in Psalm 42. And he says, like the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul longs for you.

God, I'm thirsting for you. Oh God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God? It's a hunger for God that aches. It's a thirst for God that burns.

That burns. We're starving to be justified by God. We're starving to be reconciled to God. We're starving and desperate to be sanctified by all the means of God's grace.

By his scriptures, by prayer, by worship, by fellowship. We so want to be rid of those desires in our lives that separate us from God.

And we so want to be glorified with God one day that we'll not only be free from the penalty of sin and the pollution of sin, but we'll be free from the presence of sin itself.

[18 : 56] Do we hunger and do we thirst for this kind of righteousness? Jesus says that he's come to fill the empty.

Those who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy before God. Those who weep over their sin and their self-centeredness and their failures to love. Those who are willing for others to think about you the way that God sees you and your humility and lowliness of heart.

And those who have a ferocious appetite for God to have a right relationship with God. And to receive that perfect righteousness that comes from God and God alone.

That's where the Christian life begins. With emptiness. Jesus can only fill people who are empty. And you see, Jesus comes and he fills the empty.

But he not only fills the empty, he comes to pour out the full. Right? He wants to pour out the full. And these beatitudes are a microcosm of the way in which Jesus makes disciples.

[20 : 04] He first drives us down on our knees, because that's the only place where you can receive grace. And then he stands us up on our feet to serve others with the grace that we've been served by God.

Right? Jesus first blesses the poor in spirit and joy and power and righteousness. And then he blesses us. He blesses others through us by giving mercy and purity and peace through us.

And you'll notice that in these beatitudes, there's a shift in gears. Somewhere in the middle, from God's grace to you, to God's love through you.

That if you've received God's gift of salvation, then it's now yours to go work out that gift in moral terms. That if you've been brought into the privileges of a relationship with the blesser, then it's now our responsibility to pour out his blessings on others.

You follow in the logic of the beatitudes? Jesus says, blessings on you who are full of mercy.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

[21 : 13] This does not mean that we practice mercy at the expense of truth or righteousness or justice or holiness. Jesus was fiercely committed to those things and yet he was compassionate.

Right? He had compassion on those who were spiritually stuck in the misery of their sin. Compassion on people who were stuck in their guilt and shame and fear. Yet, he had compassion on people who were materially left half dead by the side of the road until finally a good Samaritan came along.

And what he's saying here is that rather than condemn people and rather than resent people and rather than pass people by, my disciples extend mercy.

Extend that same mercy that they've received from God himself. Right? And that is the perfect and central illustration of mercy is that God the Father sent his only son, Jesus.

And that Jesus in his mercy emptied himself, he humbled himself, and he saw us in our miserable and pitiable state. He saw us sinning against each other and causing one another to suffer.

[22 : 26] He saw us in our rebellion and our law breaking. And he came and in his mercy, he substituted himself right in the middle of us on his cross. And Jesus says, if you've been shown that mercy of God, then you must show that mercy to other people.

Blessings on you who are full of mercy. And blessings on you who are full of purity. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. And that's a problem, of course, because Jesus says elsewhere in the gospel, he says, it's from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come.

Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

It's a lot of stuff that comes out of our hearts. Right? And Jesus is saying, look, purity of heart means that you've died to that old self.

It means that you've been crucified with Christ, that God has given you a new heart and a new nature. And out of that new heart, you now will one thing and one thing only.

[23 : 41] Right? You're done with all double-heartedness. Now you have the single-hearted clarity on the one thing that you want above all other goods.

And what is that? The psalmist in Psalm 27 says, That's a person who has purity of heart.

They want one thing. They have a singular passion, and that is to see the presence of God, the beauty of God, and the face of God.

And Jesus is saying, if that's the one thing you really want more than all else, that's what you will get. By faith, you'll see it now. But one day, your faith is going to be turned to sight, and you are going to enter into the purity of God's holy presence.

And you yourself on that day are going to be faultless and blameless, and you are going to have a sight that's beyond all imagining, all description. You are going to see God.

[25 : 04] Blessings on you who are full of mercy, and blessings on you who are full of purity, and blessings on you who are full of peace. Right?

Blessings on the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. Whether you're at home, or at church, or at work, or at school, or in your community, you want people to experience the one thing that can give them peace in their heart.

The one thing that can bring peace between individuals, peace between races, peace between classes, peace between groups, peace between nations. And what is that? You want them to have peace with God.

You're a peacemaker. And peacemaking is, of course, a divine activity. Colossians 1 says that through Jesus, God reconciled to himself all things by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

And a peacemaker looks at that and says, well, just as God took initiative toward me, I'm going to seek out my conflicted friend, or spouse, or sibling, or child, or church member, or neighbor.

[26 : 22] And I'm going to, a peacemaker is going to enter into that situation, and they're going to know how not to speak. But just how to listen.

And how to apologize. And how to risk holding someone accountable. And speaking the truth in love. And waiting for someone to repent.

A peacemaker. In a church context, as somebody who absorbs anxiety. And cools anger. And decreases tension. And fosters listening.

And gets to root issues. And especially does this in the church. Because this is the one place where we really should be at peace. And Jesus says, if you do that, you're a child of God.

You're a child of God because you're acting like your heavenly father who reconciled us to himself at infinite cost. The cost of the blood of his own son, Jesus.

[27 : 23] Blessed are you. If you're full of mercy, and full of purity, and full of peace. And if you're like, I'm full of none of those things. Well, blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Right? It always goes back to that. Jesus fills the empty. And he pours out the full. But finally, he also rejoices in rejection. He rejoices in rejection.

If you're going to live this way. A life of mercy. And purity. And peace. Then you're going to experience this last beatitude. Which is, blessed are you.

And people persecute you. Because of righteousness. For yours is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus elaborates on that in verse 11. And he says, blessed are you when people insult you.

Persecute you. And falsely say all kinds of evil against you. Because of me. Rejoice and be glad. Because great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

[28 : 20] Jesus is saying, look, if you align yourself with me. And my identity. My righteousness. My kingdom. My mission. You need to go ahead and give up your need for people to like you.

Give up your need for people to approve of you. And respect you. And treat you well. Because if you live like me. You're going to be treated like me. And we know that the son of God, he spent three years.

And he blessed the poor in spirit. And those who are mourning. And those who are meek. And those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness. He spent three years giving mercy to the sin sick and the suffering.

He spent three years embodying this purity of heart. To love God. And want his glory above all else. He spent three years making peace between creatures who'd been alienated from their creator. Making peace between men and women. Making peace between rich and poor and Jew and Samaritan and Zealot and Tax Collector and Republican and Democrat.

[29 : 24] He spent three years making peace. And basically in those three years he said, I am the Beatitudes. I am the Blessed One.

I am blessing incarnate. And what did the world do when it met the Beatitudes in the flesh? He was persecuted because of righteousness.

He was insulted. He was reviled. He was falsely accused. He was verbally abused. He was beaten. He was spit upon. He was pushed out into the darkness to suffer alone.

Ultimately he was murdered on a cruel and senseless cross. Right? And what do we see? What do we see when we look upon this crucified Christ?

We see the most spiritually poor person who's ever existed on planet earth. Why? Because there in that moment he's taking our bankruptcy.

[30 : 31] He's taking our grievous sins that we should be mourning over. He's taking our lowly status. In all of our misery.

He's taking our hunger and thirst for the things that we do not have. Which is righteousness itself. And yet in that place of crucifixion. He's full of mercy.

Praying. Father forgive them. For they don't know what they're doing. There in that place of his cross. He has purity of heart to will one thing.

And that is to love God the Father to the end. To the full. To carry out his plan of salvation. He's making peace in that place. Through his blood shed on the cross.

Here is Jesus. The Beatitudes. Crucified for all to see. The ultimate reject for righteousness. And he's the one who's saying to us.

[31 : 28] Brothers and sisters. Rejoice. And be exceedingly glad. Because great. Is your reward in heaven. In the kingdom of God.

Even the worst things that can happen to you. Can produce joy. And you say well how can that be? Jesus says well look at my cross. My rejection.

Means. Your salvation. My persecution means your redemption. In the irony of ironies. As that which the evil one meant to bring death.

And darkness and destruction to Jesus. Actually brought life and light. And life to us. And if God can so subvert. The purposes of evil.

In Jesus. And at his cross. Then he can surely do that. For those of us. Who are committing ourselves. To live with Christ. And in Christ.

[32 : 26] And like Christ. Those of us who are committing ourselves. To seek first his kingdom. And his righteousness. And to try to live out. The sermon on the mount. Jesus is saying to us. Whatever losses. You might experience. On my account. Are one day for you. Going to be great. And eternal. And infinite. And infinite. Gains.

In heaven. So it's worth it. It's worth whatever you have to do. To live like this. Jesus. Jesus' rejection.

Made possible. All the promises. Of these beatitudes. And that's why he's saying. Leap. For joy. And be. Thrilled.

At what you have. Now. And what you're going to have. In the future. And what is that? What do we have. Friends. What are we. Going to have. What is already ours.

[33 : 27] In Christ. Well look at the end. Of each beatitude. He says. Yours. Is the kingdom of God. Yours. Is the comfort. Of his forgiveness. Yours. Is the hope.

That you're going to rule. Over the whole earth. With King Jesus. Yours. Is the satisfaction. That you've been robbed. In the righteousness. Of Christ. And that that righteousness. Will one day. Be actually. Yours. Yours. Are the. The infinite. Mercies of God. Yours. Yours is a VIP pass. To see the beauty. And the glory. Of God. Yours is the privilege.

Of being called. A child. Who can cry out. Abba. Father. What more. Could we possibly want. What more. Could we possibly want. Than the blessings. That Jesus is giving to us here. All that we need. And way more than we need. God.

[34 : 24] Has been given to us. By Jesus. So. The invitation. The invitation. Is let us. Let's be true Christians. Let's be a real.

Community of disciples. Let's live our lives. Surrendered. To the blesser. And to all of his many blessings. Blessed are you friends.

For yours is the kingdom. Of heaven. Lord. Amen. Amen. It's healing. Amen. today.