

The Character of the Kingdom of Heaven

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to have the Bible reading now, so please open your Bibles. Matthew chapter 5, verses 1 to 10. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[1 : 1 3] Well, yeah, today we return to the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. And we're going through chapters 5 to 7 and into 8, and it's commonly known, Sermon on the Mount.

You might know it well. And as Simon said, I'm kicking off this series, but there's a bunch of guys, so Matt, Sam, Simon and Wilker, who's going to be taking one of these sermons and helping us go through it.

I reckon the Sermon on the Mount used to be quite well known in society. If you said the Sermon on the Mount, most people down the street would know what you're talking about. I'm not so sure that the current generation that that's true.

But it's still got the most quoted verse in the Bible in it from unbelievers and believers alike. Any guesses at what that is?

Judge not, yeah. Chapter 7, verse 1. Do not judge, or you too will be judged. We might think it's John 3, 16, but it's do not judge. As if somehow Jesus is saying, yeah, be tolerant.

[2 : 2 0] Even though a few verses later he's saying, my words will determine, how you respond to them will determine your eternal destiny. That's not very tolerant. So it's still very misunderstood, even though it's got the most quoted verse in it.

But what about in the church? You might be familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. I wonder if there's something even more dangerous than ignorance. What if we're coming today and we think we already understand it?

Maybe this term we need to actually unlearn some things. So before we get into this series, I want to just ask a few questions about how are you coming to the Sermon on the Mount?

So the first thing I want to ask is, are you treating the Sermon on the Mount as a unified sermon?

So you're hoping today to hear a unified talk from me. You can be the judge of whether I succeed at that or not.

With an introduction and body and conclusion that all ties together. Are we expecting that when we come to the Sermon on the Mount? I think in the past I've treated it like this encyclopedia of topics on how to be a good Christian.

[3 : 3 4] So it's got stuff about lust and anger and divorce and not retaliating, not judging, loving your enemies, praying, giving to the needy, not worrying about your material needs.

Are we treating it like are we dissecting it and just focus in on a little part? I think the danger in doing that is it lends itself to becoming moralism, where we just need to try better to be good Christians.

So in this term, we're not going to focus in on those subtopics. We're going to do larger chunks of the Sermon on the Mount. Hopefully that will help us see that this is a unified sermon.

Jesus has a unified message he wants us to hear. In the sermon, we've got an introduction which we're going to look at today and then Matt Hand is going to take us through the next bit.

So we've got the character of being in the kingdom and then Matt Hand will show us how that will make us salt and light in the world. So that's the introduction to his sermon. Have a look at chapter 5 verse 17.

[4 : 49] Here's the start of the body of the sermon. Do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets. I've not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.

So there's the theme of this sermon. And then you can see that he finishes the body. If you flip over to chapter 7 verse 12. Where are we?

Verse 12. Chapter 7 verse 12. So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you for this sums up the law and the prophets.

Somehow Jesus is going to fulfil the law to bring in the kingdom of God. And then you'll see after that, you've got the subheadings there, the narrow and wide gates.

Suddenly we've got two choices. You can go down a narrow path or a wide path, a narrow gate or a wide gate. One leads to life or death. There's true and false teachers.

[5 : 47] There's true and false disciples. There's the wise and the foolish builders who build their house. One house stands, the other falls. It's that conclusion. We need to respond.

There's two ways to live. So are you coming ready to hear a unified sermon? The second thing. Are you coming to the sermon with the rest of the gospel in mind? Matthew's placed this at the beginning of Jesus' life. Now maybe the sermon was the very first thing, one of the very first things Jesus did.

Maybe it was later on. I'm not really sure. But Matthew places it at the beginning. I think that tells us we need to understand the life of Jesus. First we need to understand this sermon.

We need to listen to this sermon. And then we can see Jesus' life more clearly. I think the sermon actually wants us to become poor in spirit, so that then when we look to Jesus' life, we can then see what it looks like to be full.

[6 : 52] Or do we remember what the summary of Jesus' ministry is about? Chapter 4, verse 17. So chapter 4, verse 17.

From that time on, Jesus began to preach. Here's his first words. Here's a summary of his entire ministry. Repent. Repent. Turn around. Change your life completely.

Repent. For the kingdom of heaven has come near. The kingdom of heaven has arrived. It is here. And so we need to repent.

That should make us ask, why do we need to change? Entrance into the kingdom is not automatic. What is it about this kingdom that our normal way of life means we're not in it?

Our normal way of life from birth, we are not in the kingdom. We need to repent. Are we coming to the sermon ready to learn that? Why do we need to repent? What is this kingdom?

[8 : 02] A total change has to occur. And why should we listen to Jesus? That's a big call that you need to repent.

You need to change and listen to me. Why listen to this guy? Why? Well, we've seen, last time we went through Matthew, we've seen his birth narratives, as Simon introduced today.

It was very strange stuff. But it all pointed to the fact that this is God's promised king. He's arrived. The king has arrived. And then what have we seen so far?

He was baptised. We can listen to Jesus because the very first act we see him do, I like how Sinclair Ferguson describes this.

You've got all these people coming to John in the Jordan, having their sins forgiven. It's like their sins are washed off into the water of the Jordan River. And it's just this murky mess of sin in that river now.

[9 : 02] And what does Jesus do? Even though spotless, he wades into it. He's picturally taking it upon himself. There's a very good reason to listen to this man.

That's the character of this man, this king. And then we see him, he confronts Satan. He confronts the enemy that all of us believe his lies and he doesn't.

He stands firm where the rest of humanity fall. This guy can win. He's got the power. He's got the power to undo Satan's work.

And he's got the power to call. We see the first disciples. He's just, Andrew, follow me. Simon, follow me.

And they drop their entire life and follow him. This king has the power to summon. And then he's got the power to restore. All the sickness that comes to him, he heals.

[10:04] There's some very good reasons to listen to this man. He can defeat the enemy. He identifies with our sin. He can change our lives.

He can restore us. So are we ready to listen to hear why we need to repent? In verses 1 and 2, he goes up onto a mountain.

I think the fact that he goes up onto a mountain should make us think of Moses. Moses. Yeah, Moses. That's right. Moses on Mount Sinai.

Where all Israel are gathered to Moses to receive the law on what it means to belong in this kingdom. Jesus is about to describe what it means to belong in this kingdom.

He's this new Moses. This new connection between heaven and earth. Now in these verses, I was sorely tempted to skip over the detail.

[11:07] He opened his mouth and he began to teach them, saying, like, why tell us that he opened his mouth? That's a strange detail, isn't it?

Is it so that we don't think he was a ventriloquist? I don't think so. I doubt it. Maybe it's saying he's not going to quote other rabbis.

The source of his authority is himself. Maybe that's why. I wonder if it's something else. I wonder if there's an even deeper reason that Matthew wants us to focus on his mouth.

This is the first time public came to him, that we're told in Matthew anyway. What does he do? The first public rally. This is a significant moment.

How's he going to kick off his ministry? What's he going to do? He could have drawn a sword. Let's go. The kingdom is here. He could have made denarii, coins, fall from heaven and filled up everyone's pockets.

[12:11] He could have kept healing all the sickness, but he doesn't. He opens his mouth. I just wonder if we're meant to think, is the words of Jesus the source of blessing?

Do we see his mouth as the source of eternal life? I keep falling back into the same kind of thinking. That if only I add more of God into my life, if I have a closer walk with him, then my mental state will be in a better condition. My relationships will be better, more harmonious, and my impact on the world will be more successful.

I think if we come to Jesus' words here, wanting to add more God into our life, we're going to miss the point. If we come to this wanting to add more God into our life, we will miss the point.

The problem isn't that we're coming to Jesus empty in order to be filled. Our problem is we're already half filled on the things of this world. We want Jesus to just top us up, please.

[13:31] Does that describe you? That describes me. I'm pretty happy with the things of this earth. I just want Jesus to top me up, make me full. Our problem isn't that we're empty.

Our problem is we're half full. If we listen to the words that come out of Jesus' mouth, he's going to make us empty. The sermon contains some devastating words.

Blessed are the persecuted. Does that jar in your mind? It jars in my mind. How can that be? Or he says at the end of chapter 5, if you want to be in the kingdom, you therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

That's devastating news. Who can do that? Don't come expecting to add more God to your life.

Get ready to be emptied, made poor. But don't fear that. Because his very first words, as Jen has already helped us understand with the kids' talk, he's given us a great promise.

[14:52] Bless are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So let's not fear that. But let's come ready to be made poor, because then the kingdom of heaven is ours.

So what do you think will make your life blessed?

A blessed condition. At home we've got this magazine called Wellbeing. And the front cover, I'm just intrigued by it, the front cover has this lady all rugged up with her PJs and a blanket over her, with a warm drink in her hands, and she's staring off with her eyes closed, with a serene look on her face. That's well-being. Now I like a cup of tea all rugged up as much as the next person. I'm not having a go at that. But what about those times in life, metaphorically speaking, when we are bruised and hurting?

What about the times when we just feel naked and cold and alone and surrounded by so many things that just stress us out? Or at the end of life, when we know we're not going to leave that hospital bed, can we be blessed then?

[16:12] Can I look at my life and go, I am blessed? I think we all fall into the trap again and again, believing that if only my external circumstances change, then I will be blessed.

Only then I will be blessed. For me at the moment, I reckon I'll be blessed if Samuel just slept through the night. Come on.

And then my friends with the newborn saying, oh yeah, my daughter sleeps through the night. It's a cinch. It's like, yeah, thank you for telling me that. That really helps me.

If only I would get sleep, I would be a better person to Emma. My character would be better. I would have more productivity.

My mental state of mind, oh, it would be so much better. If only I had this. Change my circumstances, God, and then I'll be blessed. Now you might be sitting there thinking, I envy you, David, that you have a sleepless night with a child.

[17:19] You might be envying me. What is it for you? What do you think? If only you had this, I'd be blessed. I'd be in a blessed condition.

I like R.T. France's definition of the blessed person. It's someone whose place in life is an enviable one. The blessed state Jesus is about to describe transcends our circumstances.

We can be blessed no matter what. Whether good or ill, success or failure, acceptance or rejection, health or illness, stress or at leisure, we can be blessed.

It's the enviable life. Are you ready to hear it? Do you want it? I want it. I believe I have it, but let's see what it is. Here's the description of the people who are blessed.

Poor in spirit, mourn, meek, humble, hunger and thirst, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted.

[19:01] Does it sound very good? Is that really the enviable life? Now, I'm stopping at verse 10 there.

You might wonder, why haven't we gone to verse 11? You got blessed again. If you notice there that verse 3 and verse 10, you've got the same promise at the end.

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This whole group, 3 to 10, is describing the state of the person who's in the kingdom of heaven.

We can't pick and choose these and go, I'm a peacemaker, but I'm not meek. I need to work on that. This is one group, characteristic of the group.

In verse 11, the pronoun changes from they, describing this group, to you. Bless you when people insult you. It starts talking direct to the disciples.

[19:59] So, 3 to 10, this is what it means to belong to the kingdom. This is the enviable life. Let's quickly go through these. Just make sure we understand them before we can decide how to respond to them.

So, verse 3, poor in spirit. Have you ever experienced those times in life where you just come to the end of yourself? You just, you don't have the resources to get through.

you just got nothing in the tank. You've got absolutely nothing. You come to the end of yourself, all you have to look to is that God does something, that God helps you.

Have you ever been to that place and yet felt full? To have peace, even though you're afraid and sad? I think those times are rarer than I want them to be but there is a real joy there when we come to the end of ourselves and we just, we just look to God.

We have to trust him. That's all we've got. I think that's what it means to be poor in spirit. And it's in spirit, it's not materially.

[21:17] This is an internal attitude that these characteristics are describing. It's a spiritual reality, internal kingdom. It's to have an attitude of self-emptiness before God, only relying on his goodness.

Now I don't think life has to go badly to be poor in spirit. I think we can be empty of ourselves relying on God all the time. But, in God's goodness, sometimes he breaks us down so that we actually get to that point.

He strips us back so that we can actually be in this blessed state. So, poor in spirit. And then we've got verse 4, mourn. What the Christian mourns over, I think, is kept undefined here because sin has infiltrated everything.

If we mourn sin in myself and sin in others and sin in this world and sin in the church and we just feel the destruction of sin, why wouldn't we mourn?

There's so much to mourn over. And then it's the meek and humble. So, meek is not a false humility that still keeps the attention on yourself and you're still self-absorbed.

[22 : 42] But meekness is a true humility before God. It's a stance before God. And being in that state, you are therefore gentle.

Even when you're attacked by others, because of your stance before God, you're even gentle. Because the person who is brought to the end of themselves, relying on God, mourning for sin, they're just totally dependent on him.

They don't have to fret. They don't have to control circumstances. They just, they can be meek and gentle. And then we've got hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Being freed from being obsessed with ourselves, now looking to God, our desires change. We've got a taste of what God is like and we want more of it. We want to be like him.

But the more we get to know God, the more we realise how much we're not like God, and so we hunger and thirst. As a deer pants for water, so my soul longs for you.

[23 : 45] The Christian is not finally satisfied, ultimately anyway, until we have God and are like him. And then merciful, having received such mercy from God, how could we not just love mercy and want to give mercy to others, want others to have the mercy of God as well.

And then pure in heart. Pure in heart, we might think it's about being sexually pure or morally pure, but it's much broader than that. Pure in heart is having a single devotion for God, loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

And obviously that will show itself morally, but it's having that single devotion, a pure heart. And then peacemakers, rejoicing in the Father, not giving up on us, but even sending his Son to give us peace.

We want others to have that same peace. Not just keeping the peace, but trying to make peace. And therefore, verse 10, persecuted.

Because these values are so foreign to this world, this kind of person is not welcome. Is this the normal way of thinking that you've come across in others?

[25 : 18] Or in yourself? Let's make it personal. Does it come natural to you, these kind of attributes? It doesn't come naturally for me. I come from this world.

I still live in this world. Consider what this world might think of Jesus' teaching. Poor in spirit. If anything, this sounds psychologically dangerous to believe this.

You need positive thinking. Don't think you're poor in spirit. Think positively, and then you'll be blessed. You need self-esteem. You need self-actualization, where you need your physical and emotional and safety, all those needs met, and then you can reach your full potential.

Only then. This is dangerous teaching, Jesus. Poor in spirit. What about the rest?

Mourning. That's the opposite of blessedness. What's going on? Pain is bad. Sadness is bad. Avoid them at all costs. People might say that humility is a virtue, but then live all of life believing I need to assert myself if I'm going to survive in this world.

[26 : 42] I need to insist on my rights. They say humility is a virtue, but do people live it? The meek? Really? And hunger and thirst.

Why hunger and thirst? You can be satisfied now. Don't wait. Be satisfied now. And mercy. Yeah, mercy is good as long as I'm on the receiving end, but if you wrong me, every fiber of my being wants retaliation, wants retribution.

To show mercy would be an injustice. I love mercy when I get it, but does it go the other way? And peacemaking.

People who keep the peace are rare. They're rare. People say comments all the time that just could destroy peace.

But people who are actively trying to create peace, they're even rarer still. peace. When everyone is scrambling over the top of each other to get a slice of this earth, peace is only helpful if it serves my own agenda.

[27 : 57] These values, the world does not believe them. We don't naturally believe them. It's as if these are two completely different kingdoms.

kingdoms, the kingdom of heaven and I'll call it the kingdom of earth. They're completely different kingdoms. Two ways of looking at reality, two value systems.

And so anyone who embodies the kingdom of heaven is not welcome. You are alien and a foreigner in the kingdom of earth. You are not welcome.

like a foreigner who might just, it might be a subtle thing where you just don't feel totally welcome in a new culture or it might be an overt thing like we're seeing at the moment where people were

spitting.

I had a friend from college who just down the street, she's from Hong Kong and someone just spat on her because of the COVID going on at the moment. Sometimes the persecution is just you don't belong, other times it's quite avert.

[29 : 12] Embodying this, don't expect to fit in in this world. And yet Jesus says this is the enviable life.

How is that possible? How is this the enviable life? I don't think there's anything inherently good about hardship.

I don't think Jesus is saying you must have hardship and then hardship itself is blessed. There's nothing inherently good about hardship.

So why is this the blessed life? It's blessed because of the promises. The second half of each of these verses. You only believe that this is the enviable life if you believe these gracious promises. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They will be comforted. They will inherit the earth. They will be filled.

[30 : 12] They will be shown mercy. They will see God. They will be called children of God. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. God. It's the promises that make this the enviable life.

When your confidence in yourself is stripped away forcing you to rely on God you can look at yourself and go my life belongs in the hands of a good king. I am in the kingdom of heaven. I'm blessed. As you mourn, as you bear the burden of living in a sin-filled world you can say I am blessed for I soon will be comforted.

As you are wronged and you don't retaliate, you don't strive to be on top of this world and you seemingly miss out all because you want to wait for God to act. You can know this promise. I will inherit the earth. I don't need to have it now. I don't need to be on top. As you feel so discouraged by your own sin, getting the upper hand in your own life, you're just thirsting for righteousness, righteousness, you want righteousness to characterize the church and the world and you just, there's so much self-centeredness in me and others and I will be satisfied.

[31 : 33] The kingdom of righteousness is coming. I will be satisfied. As every fiber of your being wants to get justice when that Christian friend offends you, as I look forward to the day of judgment and I know I'm only going to receive mercy, I'm blessed.

I'm blessed. As you wrestle with feeling double-minded, your heart desiring God but also desiring this world and this tension is just constant.

I wish I was more pure in my devotion to God. He's the promise. I will see God and when I see him, I will be like him. I am blessed.

That struggle means I will see God. I am blessed. As you feel despondent that there's so much peace breaking, even among Christians, you can still pursue it.

don't give up on it because I'll be called a son of God. Look at the character of my father. Look at the lengths he went to to create peace. Peacemaking is worth it because I'm a child of God.

[32 : 55] I'm a son. I'm a daughter of God. And as you feel like you don't fit in with society, with your friends, with your colleagues, with family even, you can say, well, there's a reason for that because I belong to the kingdom of heaven.

I am blessed. I am loved by my king. I am blessed. I don't think we value these characteristics naturally.

So how do these promises become ours? Because they don't quite fit us. Because we're so in bondage to the kingdom of earth still. There's two things that need to happen.

I've already said the first one. First one, we need to be emptied. We need to let go of the kingdom of earth. We need to let go of believing that if only our circumstances change, then and only then can we be blessed.

We need to come to the end of ourselves. We need to be poor in spirit, just only looking to God. God. As we come to the rest of the sermon on the mount this term, get ready to be undone.

[34 : 08] Get ready to be flawed, emptied. Do not have confidence in yourself but in God's goodness. But again, don't fear that.

Don't resist that. Because it's the empty who have it all. It's the poor who are in the kingdom of God. And once we are emptied, once we are poor in spirit, then we're ready to hear these promises. We will look outside of ourselves to our king who embodies these characteristics perfectly.

He is the blessed one. He is the one poor in spirit. He is meek. He is pure in heart. He is merciful.

He lives the blessed life that we have recorded in the rest of the gospel. He is the blessed one. This describes our king. He came to fulfill the law.

[35 : 09] He was so poor in spirit, always trusting his father to provide every step of the way, even trusting his father that he would be raised from the dead. Every step of the way he was poor in spirit.

Who as he approached Jerusalem, he weeps. He mourns. If only you would be gathered to me. He mourns the sin of this world. He is the one who mourns.

Who is so merciful, he was known as the friend of sinners. He's the merciful one. Who always thirsted to do what was right in the eyes of his father.

Who is so pure in heart that even in the garden of Gethsemane, about to face the cross, sweating drops of blood, he prays not my will but yours be done.

Every fibre of his being wanted to go the other way and yet he's purer in heart. He loves the Lord his God with all his heart. Who is so meek.

[36 : 17] Being accused and slandered at his trial, he didn't retaliate. He didn't fight back. But entrusted himself to his father's will.

That is incredible meekness. Whose passion was to see people at peace with God. So much so that while being crucified, his nails going through his hands, father forgive them.

What a peacemaker. And who accepted the fact that belonging to his father would mean being rejected by the entire world. He accepted that persecution because belonging to his father was worth it.

He's the blessed one. It's a totally different way of life. And that's the point. We need to be emptied of ourself and look to him to have his life given to us.

He has come to make us empty and then give us his enviable life. So that looking only to him we can say, in Christ I am blessed.

[37 : 27] No matter what circumstances you might be in, I am blessed if I have him. If I have his life. Could you imagine the difference it would make in our families, in our workplaces, in this church, if we could always say I am blessed.

It would just transform it all. It would be such a difference as like a light in a dark room. As a city on a hill. This kind of attitude would just stand out.

Our priorities and goals would change. Instead of chasing after the illusion of blessedness in the kingdom of earth as if we need, we're clinging on to it as if we have to have it.

This attitude would just stand out. It would be so different. And the promises empower us to do this. The promises are the ones that empower us to have these attitudes. If we believe we are blessed, then we'll be merciful. Then we'll be pure in heart.

[38 : 39] If we believe we have it all in Christ, then we can start to resemble Christ. But I think we'll only stand out, we'll only be light in our world, if it can be clearly seen that we're not clinging to this kingdom on earth.

If people can tell that it's not our circumstances that we're relying on to be blessed, and yet we have a joy and peace that's the envy of all, that will show that we belong to a different kingdom.

There is a joy that's from outside this world. That no matter what our circumstances, we can say in Jesus Christ, I am blessed.

If you don't know this blessing yet, what are you waiting for? Will you pray with me? Father, empty us and fill us up with yourself.

Please help us to see Jesus as just living that enviable life. Thank you for your gracious promises that we can have it all in you.

[40 : 05] Lord, please speak to each one of us and help us to let go of whatever we're clinging to in this earth at the moment, so that we can look to you and know that we are blessed and then act like we are blessed.

Lord, do this so that people would see Jesus through us as a church family in the way that we live, and so that others might come to know the peace and joy that we now have.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.