

Blessings of the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Lord God, Heavenly Father, we ask now that by your Spirit you would open our eyes to see your Son and to hear his words to us. Father, please protect us from hard-heartedness and from the deceitfulness of sin.

Please help us to not think these verses are about someone else but not ourselves. And help us, Father, to repent where we need to repent and to believe where we need to believe.

All for the sake of entering your kingdom and receiving every blessing through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Well, they say this is the most famous sermon of all time.

The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, 6 and 7. Somebody gave to me, it's an interesting book, you may have seen it, it's on all the bargain tables. It probably was a good gift for me.

Great speeches of the world. And it's got, you know, it's got Martin Luther King, I Have a Dream, got the full text, a big photo of Martin. It's got JFK, ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.

[1 : 07] Big picture of JFK and Mandela. And it's kind of quaint but it's got a page there and it's got a stained glass picture of Jesus and the King James version of Matthew 5 and 6, Sermon on the Mount.

And to be honest, it doesn't quite fit in the book. I think Jesus is on a very different level to the great human orators of our age. And Matthew, in Matthew's Gospel, he doesn't really make any special claim about the Sermon on the Mount.

It doesn't really say this is like the constitution of the Kingdom of God or like some people try and make it or this is like the chorus kernel of teaching that Jesus gave.

It doesn't really say that, though. You can kind of get why it is at one level the Kingdom of God foundations, Kingdom of God 101. It is basics for the Kingdom of God.

And so it is important to us. And it's very interesting. It's a sermon that begins with the preacher walking away from a crowd, which is not... Normally preachers love a crowd. But this preacher, he walks away from a crowd.

[2 : 14] In chapter 5, verse 1, When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain. That is, he left them. And after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.

Now, who are the crowds? Who are the crowds that he's left to go to the mountain for this sort of smaller meeting? Well, they're the crowds who have come for healing. Because at the end of chapter 4, and the manuscripts of the New Testament don't have chapters, so it's all just a continuous story most of the time unless it says otherwise.

At the end of chapter 4, it's got lots, thousands of people with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics, came to Jesus and he cured them.

And the great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Jesus, the miracle man, has pulled massive crowds. Now, here is the wisdom of Jesus that he says, it's good to heal, it's good to show people the nature of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God.

But what he really wants to give them is the message. What he really wants to give them is preaching. They want miracles. He's going to give them a monologue. They want wonders.

[3 : 31] He's going to give them words, mere words. They want signs. He's going to give them a sermon. And he leaves them, as it were, and sends to the mountain to see who really wants to hear the message.

He doesn't just want people who are hanging around just in case there's some more miracles and they've got tennis elbow or something they want healed. He really wants to see who wants to hear the message. So he ascends to the mountain.

And in a way, he's kind of like a Moses figure. Moses revealed God from Mount Sinai. We don't know what mountain this is, but Jesus is revealing the new covenant like Moses from a mountain. And I think it's out of great compassion that Jesus knows our true need. Our true need is for the message of the kingdom of God. It's only in this message can anyone find the blessings of the kingdom of God.

When he's healing people, he's blessing individuals. But in the Sermon on the Mount, anyone can find the blessings of the kingdom of God. Now, they're called your Bible heading, which is not original, calls it the Beatitudes, which just comes from the Latin for blessings.

[4 : 39] And some translations following, sort of following Psalm 1 and some other Psalms, translate the word blessing happy. You know, happy are these people, happy are these people.

That's sort of right, but it's a touch frivolous. A better way to understand the word blessing here is the word approved. Jesus is saying, approved are these people, approved are these people, blessed are these people.

He's telling you, he's announcing who is in the kingdom of heaven. And at this level, Jesus is not meek at all in this act.

This is not a meek sermon. He's telling you who is in the kingdom of heaven and who is not. Who is approved, who is not. Who is blessed, who is not. It's not just sort of tidbits of advice from a wise teacher, take it or leave it, you know, that it could be reproduced elsewhere.

He is the son of God, revealing the kingdom of heaven to those who will listen. So it's an act of revelation from the son of God. And as we read it, you'll see, unless this is from God, this stuff is crazy.

[5 : 49] The stuff he's going to advise us in, it's emotionally, psychologically, it is just upside down and a laughing stock, unless it's God speaking, which it is, because it's Jesus.

And so what he wants to do is, I think, what he was doing then, I hope Jesus does now, and that is separate those who are just sympathizers of Jesus to those who are subjects of the kingdom of heaven.

Because it's very easy just to be sort of an associate of Jesus, to be vaguely sympathetic and supportive of Jesus. You could be that, but what Jesus wants is disciples.

What Jesus wants is subjects who will risk their whole life on his challenging, radical teaching. And so that's why he ascended to the mountain to separate those two groups of people.

And I hope that in your life you'll be clear today that you're a disciple of the kingdom of heaven and that the Beatitudes describe you. Well, let's have a look at them. Now, there are eight, and the shape of them is similar to the Ten Commandments in that the first half focus on the believers and their God, and the second half focus on relationships with neighbour.

[7 : 05] So it's a similar shape, if not number, to the Ten Commandments. The first one, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Pretty famous words. What's Jesus saying when he says, Blessed are the poor in spirit? He's saying he's not interested in how many books on spirituality you've read.

He's not interested in your Christian library. He doesn't give you credit for sitting through lots of church services. Jesus is saying he doesn't think much of you if you've done BSF or been to a Bible college subject or read your daily Bible reading notes.

All those things, you've won no favour with Jesus, because he says, Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy. They're the people who are approved.

Those who don't come to Jesus saying, Well, here's what I can offer you, Jesus. Please make much of me. But those who come to him bankrupt, trying to make much of him. It's quite shocking, isn't it?

[8 : 13] It's actually Jesus trying to shock us. It's hard because it's so familiar, but Jesus is trying to attack the Pharisee that lives in my heart and the Pharisee that's in you that you're tempted to be, the smug, comfortable, complacent, self-righteous person that Christians are always tempted to be.

Jesus is just cutting that down. To kind of use the phrases from that great book, Pilgrim's Progress, if you haven't read it, please read it.

It's wonderful. There's nothing in this sermon for Mr. Good Works or Mrs. Self-Reliant. This sermon cuts you down and shuts you out.

Jesus, Son of God, he decides who's in and out and he says, Blessed are the poor in spirit, the spiritually bankrupt. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So who does Jesus affirm? He affirms a person who says, who just throws their hands up and prays to Jesus, you know, I'm a worm. I'm a worm. Please have mercy on me.

[9 : 18] That's you. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. Next one is very similar. Blessed are those who mourn. They will be comforted. Verse 4. Now, I don't think it's talking about people who are mourning the loss of loved ones at a funeral, that kind of thing.

I suspect he's talking, again, about your spiritual outlook to the Father. He's saying, Blessed are those who mourn with repentance about their own spiritual state, about the mess of their life, about the evil in their heart.

If you grieve that, then you will be blessed. You will be comforted, says Jesus. Jesus. There are some Christians or some people who don't want to mourn their own sin.

They want God to make much of them. They want God to make much of them physically. They want God to make them comfortable. They want God to make them in good health and to always have good food.

Or some people want God to make much of them emotionally. They want God to prop them up in their self-esteem. They want God to sort of make them brim with confidence in themselves. They want God to send other people to praise them for their goodness.

[10 : 31] Well, that's not what Jesus is talking about here. Some people want God to make much of them spiritually. They want God to give them every spiritual gift they want. They want God to let church happen how they want church to happen.

They want God to... They want God to... They want to be theologically correct all the time and always have all the right answers. But, friends, the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said, is not any of those things.

It's not God making much of us, but it's us making much of God. And it's only when we mourn, it's only when we admit our spiritual bankruptcy that we make much of God and that we are comforted. Jesus is demanding of us a kind of very brutal self-honesty, a very brutal self-honesty. I love the prayer from the Anglican prayer book.

It says at the end of communion in the old book of common prayer, it says, God, accept our praises. You'd think, you know, God would be happy to always accept praises, but it says, God, accept our praises not weighing our merits but pardoning our offences.

[11 : 42] So even as we praise God, we are to say, God, accept our praise not weighing our merits but pardoning our offences. This is the true sorrow of repentance. Just like we sung in the hymn earlier, the mournful brokenhearted rejoice.

You know, they're the ones who are comforted. The humble poor believe. The poor in spirit believe. Jesus says, if that's you, if you know the evil in your heart and in your life, if you know your bankruptcy before God, if you mourn with sorrow of repentance, you will be comforted.

You will be comforted. Now he's done poor in spirit, those who mourn, and now he says, blessed are the meek. Now you can see the relationship between these, you know, poor, mourn, meek, you know, gentle, humble.

You can see that what Jesus is doing is building a composite picture, not a multiple choice list. What he is, these eight things are to describe the character of every believer.

And all eight, you can't just pick one, but all eight, they all go together. We'll come back to that.

Now, who are the meek? Well, the meek are those who are unassuming before God, who are poor in spirit, who are not proud.

[13 : 00] Jesus was trying to break the back of the proud and the stunning reward, did you notice what the reward was? Blessed are the meek for God will smile on them or something.

No, blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth. So, this is it. This is, this is property. If you like property, if you like investment, so you want property, be meek, you'll get the earth.

In the New Testament, the hope is that Christians will reign with Jesus over a new heavens and a new earth, a transformed creation.

And we will literally be kings and queens on the earth. How do we get that? We get that by being meek. And this kingdom is not something just for the future.

It's something that's happening now as Jesus slowly believe and goes through the earth and we, it's slowly taking over the world but we do it through meekness. We do it through humility.

[13 : 58] But the hope is we will get the earth. It's very ambitious, isn't it? I hope that you are ambitious. I hope that you're not so meek or weak that you don't want the earth.

Now, interestingly he says they will inherit the earth. So, it's something, the earth is inherited, not merited. So, it comes back to that point of it's God's gift to those who are bankrupt.

It's God's gift to those who will admit they are poor. The earth is not a medal or a prize for those do-gooders or Mr. Good Works or Mrs. Self-Reliant. It's something inherited by grace and just to come back to it comes to the meek.

There are some Christians who do want to take over the earth but they want to wield the sword or they want to wield the weapons of the world, the means of the world as if they justify the ends.

That's not what Jesus is saying.

There are other Christians who are so weak they are hopeless. They just are happy to be a kind of a holy huddle and they don't even want to take over the earth. They don't want to proclaim Christ to Doncaster and Melbourne and the ends of the earth.

[15 : 03] That's not ambitious enough. What Jesus is asking of us is a gentle but very definite ambition. Okay? So, a gentle but definite ambition.

I mean, think about Jesus. He meekly went to the cross to gain the world. So, we are to meekly serve the world to proclaim Christ, take up our cross to gain the world.

It's a very strong goal but the means is meekness. It's a stunning contrast really to say the meek inherit the earth. But we'll keep moving.

Verse 6, blessed are those, and this is the last one of the first four, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.

So, the question you should be asking yourself as you listen to this now, do I hunger for righteousness? Do I thirst for righteousness? Do I hunger for God as the deer pants for the water like that psalm we sung?

[16 : 06] If you have tasted something of God's goodness, you will be hungry for more because you'll know how good he is and you'll know that's not in yourself, that's in him alone.

There are some people though who are very quick to list their acts of righteousness. If you're kind of a lister, if you're someone who likes to recite what you've done for God, then clearly you're not hungry for righteousness.

You're very, your tummy's full. You love to tell people how full you are and the things you've done for God. You're not thirsting for righteousness. People who are angry that they haven't been rewarded enough either by God or by men.

If you're angry that you haven't been rewarded enough, you're saying, you know, your tummy's full. You're righteous enough. In fact, people haven't praised you enough or you haven't been given enough glory for what you've done. What Jesus is looking for is for people who thirst and hunger for the righteousness of God.

It's only the hungering and thirsting who will be approved, who will be blessed, who will be filled.

Jesus is trying to break our backs. He's trying to break the backs of our pride, of our presumption.

[17 : 20] He's trying to humble us today. Now, that's the first floor, us and God. The next floor address our relationships and it could be our relationships with the world but it's also addressing our relationships within the kingdom, within the church.

Jesus says, verse 7, blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. And so, he's saying a real mark of the character of the man of God or of the woman of God is mercy because the kingdom of heaven is God's mercy breaking into earth and so mercy ought to characterise us.

We ought to be people of mercy. And so, I think the way this works is that if you've done the first four beatitudes, if you know that you're poor in spirit, if you know you're broken hearted over your sin and you mourn your sin and you know that God has forgiven you by the blood of his son, then you can forgive.

I mean, this is how I argue it in my own mind. When someone has hurt me, I remind myself that I have sinned against God a thousand times more than anyone has sinned against me and God has forgiven me so I will forgive others.

That's the logic of the kingdom of God that God has forgiven our biggest sins, that we have insulted his majesty, that we have rebelled against the king of kings and lord of lords, that we deserve eternal punishment but he's forgiven us.

[18 : 47] How can we not show then mercy to others? How can we not then be characterised by mercy? Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. So, please do that, friends.

When someone has hurt you and you're tempted to be angry, you're tempted to show revenge, consider how much you've sinned against God, how that sin is so much greater than whatever they've done against you.

I find psalms like Psalm 51 very helpful. Meditate on Psalm 51. It really does put you in your place in that sense. The next one, Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

A bit later, in the coming weeks, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is going to address a whole lot of heart matters. He's going to address anger, lust, he's going to address our prayer and money and worship and all these are matters of the heart and really saying, blessed are the pure in heart. They will see God. Really, I mean, this shows you that we're listening to God's word here. There is no one in this room, including me, who can purify their own heart.

[19 : 57] Really what Jesus is commanding, only he can do in us by grace. Jesus alone can regenerate hearts. Jesus alone can take away hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh.

He's describing really what the Holy Spirit does in the life of a subject of the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Someone who is pure in heart, I mean, here's the easiest test.

Do you want to see God? If you want to see God, it shows where your heart is. If you don't want to see God face to face, it probably shows that you're caught up in the evil of your own heart.

You need to beg God to cleanse your heart so that you want to see God because that is the greatest reward, to see God. That is the point of existence.

That's the meaning of life, for us to see God. We don't see him now, but we will see him one day and that's our hope. Two more. Blessed are the peacemakers.

[20 : 57] They will be called children of God. Now, think in your own mind, what is a peacemaker? What would it mean in your life to become a peacemaker? I want to put it to you that actually peacemaking is a shocking business.

It's a radical business and it's much more disruptive than the name sounds. To be a peacemaker is to be a very disruptive person because a peacemaker is someone who never takes sides.

So when someone comes to you and says, this is what happened to me and blah, blah, blah, they want you to take sides. A peacemaker says, I want to hear the other side of the story or I want to get you two in the same room.

See, a peacemaker challenges people. It's a very radical and kind of shocking, dangerous business. A peacemaker confronts a gossip. Do you see? If you just listen to a gossip and nod, you're not making peace.

You're actually, you're aiding and abetting a war but a peacemaker confronts and rebukes a gossip. A peacemaker challenges someone when they're, if you hear someone speak evil of another believer, maybe imputing malice to them when there's a misunderstanding, if you're a peacemaker, you will challenge that.

[22 : 13] Peacemakers are like Jesus. Jesus, he comforted the afflicted but he afflicted the comfortable and peacemakers do those two things. They comfort the afflicted and they afflict the comfortable.

Peacemakers promote forgiveness by exposing sin. They, because you can only be forgiven if the sin is exposed and pointed to and an opportunity is given to repent.

Then forgiveness flows, peace flows but that can only happen when you shine a torch on someone's failure. That's what peacemakers do in love, in gentleness, in humility, in meekness but that's what peacemakers do.

See, I think there are less peacemakers around than we think and we need more. We need to be characterised by peacemaking. And finally, one final blessing and it's the most challenging, the most stark and the most stunning.

Jesus says and he expands on it verse 10, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[23 : 25] Now, think about what he's saying. Blessed are you when you are persecuted. Blessed are you when bad things happen to you for the sake of righteousness.

You'd think the kingdom would be when you do something good you get blessed but he's saying the kingdom is when you do something good you get persecuted and that's the blessing. Now, Jesus has to be God otherwise that is completely crazy.

That is completely wrong, completely opposite to what the world says. And I mean, he goes on in verse, read verse 11 and 12. He even sort of expands and says, blessed are you.

I'll just blow my nose. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Blessed are you when people lie about you and defame you because of your faith in Jesus. You are blessed. Jesus, Jesus is God.

[24 : 27] These are the words of God. This is not, there is no wisdom in this in an earthly sense. He's either God or this is crazy. But if he's God, then we need to heed it. And he, he can even command the emotion.

He can even tell you what emotion you should be feeling that you should be nurturing when you're persecuted. Rejoice, be glad for your reward is great in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

If you are persecuted and you do not in your own mind think, I'm being treated like the prophets. This is a blessing for me.

You know, I'm going to get a reward in heaven for this. I'm going to be glad in this. If you do not work through this to the emotion of rejoicing and gladness, then you're disobeying Jesus. Then you're sinning. It's a sin. Now, he's not saying that you have to sort of automatically kind of be masochistic and be happy that someone's striking you he's acknowledging there's a real pain, there's a real wrong, there's reviling.

[25 : 36] It's evil what they're doing. It's evil. We're not to be happy in evil but we're to be happy that we have a reward in heaven, that we're in the line of prophets. We're in the line of Jesus himself who took up his cross, was persecuted for kingdom's sake and received glory afterwards.

The onus is on the citizens of the kingdom of heaven to rejoice and be glad in suffering for Jesus. That's the onus. The citizens of the kingdom of heaven are not moping people.

They're not long in the face all the time because all the bad things that are happening to them. In the midst of suffering for the kingdom they're glad. They rejoice because they know their reward is great in heaven.

They know their reward is great in heaven. Well friends, let me just pull this together and close. What Jesus is building is like one of those Crime Stoppers ads where they've put together one of those Identikit pictures.

You know those photos that don't look like a real person but they somehow are a real person and if you see that person you've got to ring Crime Stoppers and there's a pair of eyes they've glued on a nose. What Jesus is saying is that composite picture has to describe us.

[26 : 51] The whole thing. You can't just say oh I've got that nose you know I'm meek. You can't just pick one of the Beatitudes and hang on to that and expect the blessing of all eight just because you've got one.

Jesus is saying the whole thing should describe a citizen of the kingdom of God. The poor in spirit the mourning over sin the humility the radical peacemaking the mercy showing the suffering for his name the purity of heart the whole thing should describe us if we are citizens of the kingdom of God you can't pick and choose.

So often I meet Christians and they have done some good in their life that maybe they've just done one really good thing one really good act of mercy and it's like they're trying to leverage that one act for God to give them the whole kingdom.

That's not how it works but our whole life is meant to be these acts of mercy and humility and peacemaking. It's supposed to be 24-7. It's really only something that God and his spirit can produce in us and if you are the kind of person that just takes one of the things and if you think I've got the nose in the identikit picture I've got that ear then you're not a citizen yet.

You're still trying to boast in yourself where Jesus is saying come to me bankrupt come to me with empty hands and I will fill you I will bless you I will comfort you I will give you the earth.

[28 : 17] You will be rewarded greatly in heaven and on earth. Friends the challenge is this lay aside all your pride lay aside all your spiritual pride everything good you've done don't count it don't hold it to God to reward you come to him with empty hands for reward and you'll be blessed more than you can ask or imagine you'll be approved more than you can ask or imagine you'll receive in heaven and earth starting now more than you can ask or imagine.

Jesus demands of us this character which only he can produce so why don't we spend some time lead us in a prayer and we'll beg of him to produce in us the Beatitudes this right heart.

Dear Jesus we pray that you would purify our hearts dear Jesus we pray that you would have mercy on our wickedness especially our wicked arrogant pride and presumption.

Lord Jesus we pray that you would have mercy on us as spiritual bankrupt people that you would make us peacemakers people who really can rejoice in suffering for your name and for your kingdom.

Lord Jesus please produce this in us and crush every sense of pride and merit and produce in us a desire to make much of you to be hungry and thirst for you alone.

[29 : 52] For Father we ask this in your son's name.