

Kingdom Values

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 1997

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] What sort of people prosper in our world? What sort of people does our world look up to?

The rich, the ambitious, the entrepreneurial, the assertive, the well-connected, the powerful, all marks of character of those that are praised and aspired to by our world.

What about these marks of character? The poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted.

No one in our world aspires to be people like that, surely. And yet for each of those eight characteristics, Jesus says, blessed are they.

Blessed by God, that is. It's God's stamp of approval. God says, I approve of people who are marked by that sort of character.

[1 : 14] Blessed are they. It's not eight different groups that are being spoken about as though Jesus is saying, blessed are you over here who are poor in spirit.

Oh, and blessed are you at the back who mourn. And blessed is this group over here who are persecuted. But it's one group of people that is being described. And the group has those eight characteristics, the mark of character that Jesus is speaking about.

Now, this is Jesus' first teaching to his disciples and to the wider crowds who are listening on. He's just called his disciples to follow him.

And now it seems he gives them the charter for character for those who want to follow him. Notice that he begins his teaching not by saying what to do, but rather what sort of character these people are to have.

So then, if we are Christians and seek to follow Jesus Christ, what sort of character should mark us as people? Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[2 : 23] The poor in spirit are those who are spiritually bankrupt. Those who acknowledge before God their need for help. Those who don't come to God saying, God, this is what I have to offer.

This is all the resources I have. Accept me, therefore. But those who come to God, as the hymn writer says, with nothing in my hand I bring, but simply to thy cross I cling.

Those who cry out to God for help. Those who depend upon God for help. The psalms are full of crying out by those who are poor, who call out for God for help, who recognise that they need God's help.

The person who is poor in spirit is the one who stands before God, beating his breast and saying, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Not the person who comes before God and says, thank you God that I am so good or I am so righteous that I have all this.

But rather the person who acknowledges their need for God's help before him. To such a person and to only such as these belongs the kingdom of heaven.

[3 : 38] The world says blessed are those who help themselves. But Jesus says blessed are those who cry out to God for help. The world says blessed are those who are the achievers, those who are rich, those who are self-sufficient, those who have lots of resources.

But Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit. The world's approval or Jesus' approval? Which do we seek?

What sort of person do we try to be? Blessed are those who mourn. Well, that can't be right because nobody in this world loves a mourner.

We put up with them, we tolerate them, especially if they're close to us, but we don't really love a mourner. We don't aspire to be a mourner. Rather, our world prefers glee to gloom, merriment to melancholy, laughter to lament.

So how can we say, or how can Jesus say blessed are those who mourn? For our world thinks the opposite to that. But Jesus is not just talking about somebody who's lost a loved one and therefore is in grief and mourning, but rather still maintaining the spiritual context.

[4 : 51] He's talking about a person who mourns their spiritual state, who bewails their manifold sins and wickedness, as the old prayer book so well says it. In the Old Testament of the Bible, there was a man called Isaiah, who had a vision of God in a temple.

He saw the holiness of God, and in that holiness he fell down on the floor and he said, woe is me, a man of unclean lips. That was a man who was mourning his uncleanness, his failure before a holy God, his imperfection, his impurity, or as another word the Bible uses, his sin.

St. Paul in the New Testament had the similar sort of expression, wretched man that I am, bewailing his sinful life before a holy God. But it's not just people who are mourning their own spiritual bankruptcy before God, but those who mourn the state of the world, the selfishness, the cruelty, the shame, the destruction, the evil, the war, the degradation, the depravity of the world, those who mourn it.

It's so easy for us when all these pictures are paraded across our screens every night to be blasé, to be immune from mourning the state of the world in which we live.

But Jesus says, blessed are they who mourn. Why? Because they shall be comforted. Not a, well, cheer up chap tomorrow is going to be better type of comfort, but rather a comfort that comes from God himself.

[6 : 17] A comfort that comes from God because God is a God who forgives us our failures and sins. A God who deals with our failures and imperfections and impurities. When Isaiah fell in the temple before God, what God did next was to offer him forgiveness, demonstrated through burning coals from the altar.

And Isaiah arose a forgiven man. The same with Paul. Wretched man that I am, he said, and then he said, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God is a God who offers forgiveness of sins. A God who offers to cleanse our imperfections and impurities before his holiness. That's the sort of God that we're dealing with.

And that's why Jesus says, blessed are they who mourn, for they indeed shall be comforted. The idea of comfort in the Bible is not one of ease and luxury like a nice padded armchair, but rather the comfort that comes from knowing God's forgiveness.

Comfort, comfort my people, said Isaiah the prophet later in his book. To people who are suffering and punished. Why could he offer comfort? Because your sins have been dealt with, he went on to say in that chapter.

[7 : 32] Yes, the promise of God is for those who mourn their sins that they will indeed be comforted and forgiven. Something that Christians know now, but something that is perfect only in heaven.

The very end of the Bible, we get a glorious picture of the heaven of God. A picture of God's people dwelling in God's place with him directly. And we're told, and there will be no more sin or crying or death or mourning there.

It's a place of joy. For these are people who have found their comfort from God. He's forgiven their sins and they are restored to him with joy.

The world says, blessed are those who are happy, cheerful, smiling and joyful. But Jesus says, blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed also are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Well, not in our world they're not.

[8 : 39] The meek are despised and looked down upon. Hardly anybody aspires to be a meek person. To be meek is weak in our world and also in Jesus' world as well. It was not a virtue that anybody looked up to.

But meekness is humility, is putting other people first, recognising our own spiritual bankruptcy before God. We recognise that we're no better than anyone else.

Meekness or humility is putting other people first, knowing our own sin. Meekness acts in refusing to claim our own rights, refusing to justify ourselves, refusing to retaliate when hurt.

That meekness is real strength of character. That's not weakness. That's strength. The world asks the question, who inherits the earth?

And the world answers by saying, it's those who claim their rights. Those who jump in first. Those who put their hand up to be counted. Those who want what is theirs. Those who are assertive.

[9 : 43] Those who are ambitious. Those who retaliate against hurt. Those who are strong. Those who are mighty. And Jesus says, blessed are the meek. That is just like Jesus himself.

The meek one. The one who rode into Jerusalem, not on a horse, but on a donkey. He could have ridden in on a horse. He could have had armour. He could claim the city for his own, because it was his. But he chose not to claim his own rights, but rather to arrive on a lowly donkey.

The king of all. On a lowly donkey. That's meekness. And that's real strength. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Those who long for perfection. Both for their own perfection, and also for the perfection of this world. Those who are deeply dissatisfied with failure and sin in their life, and in the world.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Not those who just take it or leave it if it's offered to them, but those who have a passion for righteousness.

[10 : 55] Most of us don't know what it is to hunger and thirst in reality. Craving food or craving liquid. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are not just hoping one day to receive it, but are longing for it.

Have a passionate desire for it. Are dissatisfied in their inner being without it. Those whose goal in life is the righteousness of God. Both in their own lives, and in the world in which they live.

In the end, it's a passion for God. This description that Jesus is giving of a Christian is not a description of a perfect person.

It's a description of somebody who acknowledges their failure before God. Their sin before God. Somebody who mourns that sin. Somebody who in their relationships with other people recognizes they're no better than anybody else, and therefore exercise meekness.

But a person who's not prepared to stop there either. The person who craves perfection. Craves to be the person God wants them to be. Wanting to change.

[12 : 06] Wanting to be perfect as God is perfect. To such a person God promises satisfaction. Not in this world now necessarily, but certainly in heaven, the home of righteousness.

The world desires anything but righteousness. The world craves power, wealth, prestige, and honor. And when those things are attained, people find an emptiness that they didn't expect.

A lack of satisfaction. For power and wealth don't satisfy in the inner being, nor does prestige or honor. None of the things the world craves brings ultimate satisfaction.

But to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, God promises that they will be satisfied. They will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Those who exercise mercy to other people, knowing that they themselves have needed the mercy of God in their own lives. To be meek is to recognize that I am a sinner.

[13 : 17] To be merciful is to recognize that you too are also a sinner. And to exercise mercy to others that we have asked God for and received from him. Christians are surprisingly slow to exercise mercy to other people.

You would think that those who have tasted the mercy of God in their own life would be quick to be merciful to others who fail and fall. But no, sadly, that's not always the case.

Judy tells me that the Archbishop's phone has rung hot this week with people complaining and condemning him for the statements reported by him in the press about homosexuality.

So often, you see, we're quick to condemn the failure of others or the apparent failure of others and slow to show mercy. But if we ourselves are sinners needing the mercy of God, so too is everybody else.

How dare we be quick to condemn when we have pleaded for the mercy of God for our own lives? We ought to exercise a compassion and patience with those who fail and fall.

[14 : 24] Not necessarily meaning we condone failure, but rather exercising towards others the mercy that God has first exercised towards us. Those who are merciful receive mercy from God.

And if we're quick to condemn and slow to be merciful, then we have no right to expect the mercy of God in our own life. For those who fail, the world shows rejection.

It sacks them, retrenches them, judges them, mocks them and disregards them. But Jesus said, blessed are those who are merciful.

And blessed also are the pure in heart, for they will see God. A singleness of heart. An integrity of life is what's being spoken about here.

Not a life where the inner life is different to the external behaviour that goes on. But rather, blessed are the pure in heart are those who have an outward life that reflects an inner life.

[15 : 34] Where there's an integrity between the two. Where the public and private match. Our Christian faith and behaviour is to stem from our heart. We're not to put on a veneer of piety or religiosity or good works, but our inner heart is craving various lusts and sinful desires that nobody else sees.

And so we think that we get away with it. There's no place for hypocrisy in the Christian life. But rather, God calls us to an integrity. Where what we think reflects what we do and vice versa.

This is saying little more than what the Old Testament says. That those who follow God are to love God with all their heart and soul and strength. And so too ought we.

Not to practice some outward form of nobility and respectability. But rather to have a heart that is pure. A reminder that God indeed knows the thoughts of our hearts.

And even if other people don't detect them, God knows them. And it's a reminder for us in a baptism service as well. To what counts is not the water that splashed on a baby.

[16 : 44] Not the outward form of the promises and vows made important though they are. But God knows the hearts of those who make such promises. Any hypocrisy, any cover up may deceive other people.

But it will never deceive God. And to such as these who have a pure heart. The promise is that they will see God. Not in this life.

But in heaven to come. For again the picture of heaven at the end of the Bible. The glorious place of heaven. God's heaven. We're told that they will see his face.

Yes, we don't see God physically now. Visibly now. But the picture of heaven is of a people so perfect. So united with God. That they shall see his face.

For the world. All that matters is the outward facade. The outward performance. No boss cares about private immorality or morality. All they care about is that at the end of the day the goods are delivered outwardly.

[17 : 49] But Jesus says blessed are the pure in heart. For that's what counts. Before God. And they shall see God. That's the ultimate privilege and reward.

Not to be seen with the high and mighty of society. Not to be seen in the important places of this world. Not to be seen in the corridors of power. Or to see those who walk there.

But rather to be seen with God and to see God. In his heavenly palace. Much more exacting to be pure in heart. But it's also much more rewarding as well.

Blessed are the peacemakers. For they will be called children of God. Not blessed are the pacifists. Not blessed are the peaceful people. Not blessed are the wimps who never complain or never do anything about anything.

But rather blessed are the peacemakers. The active people. Those who seek to establish peace. Peace with God and peace with other people. Those who seek to bring reconciliation where there's hatred, hostility and war.

[18 : 55] Blessed are those people. And those people are rare. Most of us take a step back. Most of us are not prepared to get our hands dirty. Most of us are not prepared to stand in the middle of an argument and seek to bring reconciliation.

But blessed are the peacemakers. Those who get in the middle. Those who seek to bring reconciliation. Whether it's between a husband and a wife. Or a parent and a child. Or some friends that are broken up or something like that.

Or whether it's those who are seeking to bring peace between countries. Or those who ultimately are bringing peace between people and God. Blessed are those people. Those who take action to bring peace in this world that is so starved of peace.

And they shall be called the sons of God. Not just the children of God. But actually it's the sons of God. Why? Because the son reflects in ancient idiom the character of God. For God is the real peacemaker.

God is the one who brings peace between himself and us. Because Jesus died on a cross for us. God is the one who brings peace between people. Because of the unifying death of Jesus on the cross.

[19 : 56] Blessed are those who reflect God's character. By bringing peace between people and God. And people and people. The world doesn't say that. The world says blessed are those who win at war.

Blessed are the victors. Blessed are those who walk over others. Blessed are those who have corporate takeovers. Blessed are those who win personal battles against their enemies. Blessed are those who win in politics.

And in business. But Jesus says. Blessed are the peacemakers. For they shall be called the sons of God.

And lastly. Blessed are those who are persecuted. For righteousness sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What folly in this world. A world where peer group pressure is not a teenage phenomenon. But lasts for all of life. A world that seeks for us to conform to it in every way.

[20 : 55] Blessed are the popular you see the world says. Blessed are the conformists. Blessed are those who do what everybody else does. But Jesus says blessed are the persecuted.

For righteousness sake. Not encouraging us to seek persecution for its own sake. But blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. That is for God's sake.

For Jesus sake. And yes indeed there are some who are persecuted. We may think that in our very liberal and very tolerant age. Nobody is going to be persecuted about anything. That the first person to be persecuted.

Is the Christian. Who stands up for God's sake. Who are those who Jeff Kennett has the least time for. Christians. Who espouse God's standards in this world.

But of course. This is not the only society in the world. All over the world. There are Christians being persecuted. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ. And if the trends continue.

[21 : 50] More people will be put to death this year. For Christian faith than last year. And there were more last year than the year before. There have been more this century than all the other centuries put together. People dying for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Didn't just happen in the Roman Empire. When they were fed to the lions at the Colosseum. It's happened in every society virtually. In every age. Christians persecuted. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

The world ridicules them. Mocks them. Disregards them. Ignores them. Rejects them. And kills them. But Jesus says. Blessed are they. The character demanded of the followers of Jesus Christ.

Is very different from the character aspired to. By most people in this world. If you want to get on in the world today. Don't adopt this sort of character. The world.

You won't succeed in the world. If you're meek. Pure in heart. Poor in spirit. Peacemaking. Etc. But Jesus' command to his disciples.

[22 : 53] Is not to get out of the world either. He's not saying withdraw from it. And exercise your character independent of it. But rather be Christians in the world. He goes on to say.

You'll be salt. And light. That if you exercise Christian character. As he's just described in those eight ways. Then you'll be salt in this world. A world that is fairly tasteless.

Requiring the salt of God's standards. And morals. And character. In the ancient world. The salt. Salt was used as an idiom for wisdom. Christians are called to be wisdom in the world.

If you are somebody who lost your saltiness. You're a fool. Jesus is calling his followers. To be salt. To be wise in the world. And to be light.

The good works. The good character. Is to reflect the light of God himself in the world. Jesus you see was under no misapprehension. His followers would be different.

[23 : 54] His followers wouldn't be people of the world. They would be people of God. Their standards would be different. Their character would be different. Their behavior would be different.

All exercised in the world as salt and light. But of course that doesn't mean popularity in the world either. The world rarely applauds.

When a Christian exercises Christian morality and behavior in the world. There are some exceptions from time to time. But in the long run. It doesn't applaud. Those who exercise the character of Christ.

It put him to death. And it thinks of his followers in similar ways. The world loves darkness more than light. And so for those who exercise the Christian character of light.

They won't find usually a receptive audience. The pressures to conform in this world are great. But the rewards for following Jesus Christ are out of this world.

[24 : 53] Let us be people who seek God's commendation. Let us be people for whom God can say to us. Blessed are you.

Blessed are you poor in spirit. Blessed are you who mourn. Blessed are you meek. You who hunger and thirst for righteousness. You who are merciful.

You who are pure in heart. You who are peacemakers. Blessed are you who are persecuted. When people revile you and persecute you. And utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice. And be glad. For your reward. Is great. In heaven. Amen. Amen. Amen.