

Real Blessing

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[0 : 00] Well, as David said, I'd like to also wish you a blessed Mother's Day. It's a great day to have a baptism, a day of families and thinking through what it means to have children and so forth.

I know that there's a lot of newborns here this morning, and I think this is actually good for us as a way of leading into this passage that we heard.

Because when you are somebody who has a recent newborn, especially if it's your first, and for some of you that was a long time ago. For others it's very, very, very recent.

We had a 12-day-old baby baptized at 9 a.m. And for some of you, you just know about it from looking from the outside. But the first thing I think of when people ask me, well, how are things going after you've had a baby, is, well, my life has been turned right upside down.

But it's a good thing, I'll say. But when you look at it sort of objectively, you wonder, well, it doesn't actually sound that good. You have months of sleep deprivation.

[1 : 10] You've lost your free time. You often feel completely incompetent. You think, why can't I figure this baby out? And often you have your life absolutely ruled by the cry of a little one, of a little baby.

And you call that good. Well, why is that? Well, the answer is very simple. It is the presence of that little one, that little miracle in your life, which makes it all good.

It is that deep love you have for your little one as you hold him or her that brings meaning and goodness to all these things that you go through as a new parent, the inconveniences and the sleeplessness.

We are starting a new sermon series today on this baptism Sunday. And it is a sermon series called the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5 through 7 is really a synopsis of some of Jesus' core teachings about what it means to follow him.

And in the same way that I was talking about having a newborn, your life is absolutely turned upside down by this life that is described in chapters 5 through 7.

[2 : 25] And it's in a much more profound way than having children. Because what Jesus does is he turns the values and priorities that are in the world right on their head.

And it is very good, Jesus said, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed eight times. And that is because of how precious the kingdom of God is.

At times in that in the next 14 weeks when we hear the sermon series, the conventional wisdom that you've had and probably lived with all your life is going to be challenged.

And at times it will feel like a newborn. It will be uncomfortable to hear Jesus speak. It will make us feel incompetent. It may even cause us to lose some sleep.

But my hope is that you will allow yourselves to be ruled by another voice. And that is the voice of Jesus who brings hope and life and blessing with that voice.

[3 : 27] You know, if you wanted to boil this whole sermon series down to three words, you would call it a different life. And it is. It's something very different from what is in the world.

And you see it right away in the first 10 verses. If you want to look with me on page four in your Bibles, Matthew five, it's on page four in the middle part of your Bibles.

Bibles are funny. They start over again often with page one in the New Testament. So we're on page four. And what has happened is that Jesus has gathered his close friends, the people who have committed to following him.

And he is teaching them about what the character is like of someone who follows him. And right away, you're going to see how very different his values are from the values of the world.

And what I want to do is show you how different it is by contrasting some of the values of the world with the Beatitudes of Jesus. The world would say blessed are the wealthy and self-reliant, the self-sufficient.

[4 : 34] But Jesus is saying something very different. He starts out by saying blessed are the poor in spirit. And there, you know, something's going on here. Very different. This is the key to all the other Beatitudes.

It is saying to us that we come to God with nothing on the table except for our sin. We have nothing that commend us to God.

We come to him knowing that we need God above everything else. And he's saying blessed are those who have learned to trust in him alone and nothing without him.

Learn to come to him knowing that you are not going to earn God's favor, but in fact that he owes you nothing and offers you everything.

And then the world will say blessed are the carefree, those who don't have any worries. But Jesus says blessed are those who mourn.

[5 : 34] It's a shocking thing to say. How can you be blessed? How can you be privileged if you are mourning? He is saying in mourning, he's saying those who feel the loss that comes from their own sin.

Those who feel a deep sense of sorrow because what is between them and God. And probably those who feel sorrow because of the results of sin, because of hurts in your life, because of death or broken relationship.

He says blessed are those who mourn. And it's because, as we're going to see in a few minutes, God does something very powerfully through our mourning. He actually touches our lives in powerful ways.

And then the world will say blessed are those who get what they want and are really good at getting that. But Jesus says blessed are the meek. In other words, he said blessed are those who don't throw their weight around, but wait for God to give them their due.

They're not grabbing necessarily the thing that is owed to them. And then the world would say blessed are those who dine well or who are able to enjoy the good things of life constantly.

[6 : 46] But Jesus says something shocking there in verse six. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. In other words, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who have an appetite for God, who desire God inside of them and want to see God's goodness in the world around them and in their life.

So blessed are the hungry. And then the world says those blessed are those who win out against their enemies. The Bible, Jesus says you're blessed instead are those who are merciful.

And what he means by that is imagine a time when you have somebody in your power who has sinned against you. You know, your rights clearly have been violated. They are caught out.

And it would be the easiest thing in the world to really have a big victory here and squash them. Well, Jesus says blessed are those that instead of exercising that right, that you would work to restore them and help them get out of that sin.

The world would then say blessed are those who are really good at getting what they need and want, who are shrewd and devious and can work the system.

[8 : 01] But Jesus says blessed are the pure in heart. And the heart, of course, is the center in the Bible of who we are as people. It is the quality that is it is the thing that is within us that motivates us and is the essence of who we are.

And it says blessed are you if you are undivided in seeking after God, in living for him. There's a wonderful psalm that says David prays this.

And this is a guy who's after God's own heart. Give me an undivided heart that I may fear your name. I will praise you, Lord, my God, with all my heart. I will glorify you forever.

And you see, he's praying for a united heart, a heart that is completely focused on seeking after God. And what results is a life that doesn't glorify himself, which is our great temptation.

It is a life that praises God and glorifies his name forever. And then the second to the last ones, you know, the world would say blessed are those who mind their own business, who live and let live.

[9 : 08] Don't get involved. It gets messy. But Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers. And this is a powerful thing he's saying. He is saying blessed are those who work to reconcile relationships in your life, in the world around you, because this is what has happened to you by Jesus making peace with between you and God.

You have been reconciled with God and you want to live that out in your life. It's mirroring God's peace. And finally, a great value of the world.

And this is the last worldly attitude is blessed are the popular. Blessed are those who people look up to and want to be like. But Jesus says blessed are those who are persecuted.

The very opposite for righteousness sake. In other words, for those blessing are on those who really suffer simply for what is right in God's eyes and not the world's eyes.

It shows that the values of Jesus are so different that when you live them out, the world will at times persecute those who live for him. Well, the question has to be asked, where do these unworldly values come from?

[10 : 24] These things that really are upside down from what we are taught in the world. Well, let's look at verse three and ten again, because the promise that's there says theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And verse ten, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. There is this promise here of something that happens to people now, here and now today. In fact, all the blessings belong to this.

It comes out of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus followers were. Jesus is saying belong to this new society, this new nation, in a sense. And they receive deep blessings from it.

Now, that's kind of a it's a concept that we need to think about. And I was trying to figure out how to really explain that. And I think the best way is using a sporting illustration.

And so I'm apologizing to all you who disdain sports. Just bear with me for a moment. I want to talk about the Boston Red Sox, of all things. And about 20 years ago, the very loyal fans of the Boston Red Sox acquired a new name.

[11 : 33] And that name was Red Sox Nation. You probably heard that in the news if you follow baseball at all. And it is a name that is for all the fans who are very loyal and who often live way outside Boston.

So there's many fans in New England and in the Canadian Maritime Provinces. In fact, across North America, maybe even in the world that are Red Sox fans.

And this is a nation that is not a geographical entity or a political entity. Instead, they're actually a scattered people that are united by a common love for this team, for a baseball team of all things.

And in a sense, they are ruled by that team. In fact, probably in many ways, they're ruled by that team. Their identity is bound up in them. They are long suffering. I think they've gone for about 300 years without having a World Series.

They make pilgrimages to a place called Fenway Park. And their outlook on life is determined by where the Red Sox are in the standings.

[12 : 39] And also whether or not it's baseball season. So there is a picture of a different kind of nation, isn't it? Well, in the same way, the kingdom of heaven is a nation that's not defined by geographical boundaries or by a political system.

Instead, it's made up of people who have one thing in common. And that is that they have been saved by God, their sins forgiven, and they all have a common love for God through Jesus Christ.

So they are people who are very devoted and loyal to Jesus because he has made them friends of God by dying on a cross for them and rising in power.

And God, they're all going somewhere as well. It's not Fenway Park. God is in the process of bringing them to heaven. And this is the thing that really defines this nation.

And that process of being taken to heaven is what those Beatitudes are about. It's not about how you're getting into the kingdom. It's about what you are like in that process of being taken to heaven.

[13 : 50] And so that's the kingdom, as Jesus repeats in our passage eight times, that is the place of true blessing. And I must say this is something that is very relevant for us today because here in this beautiful part of the world, we tend to be people who seek out blessing, especially the blessing that this world offers.

But you know that the blessings that this world offers will always let us down, whether it's money or power or relationships, they all break down.

And of course, at our graves, they are all left behind. They are gone. There is a temporary nature to them. What we need, and I think this is what our hearts long for, is a blessing that comes from heaven that cannot be destroyed or taken away and that actually grows and takes us to the place where we are with God, that we see him forever.

It is that blessing, the blessings of these Beatitudes that actually transform our heart and our mind, which is the great need that all of us have. The work that God is doing.

And if you look at those blessings and the promises that come after them, you see that it's only God that can give them. It actually can't come from the world.

[15 : 12] So look at verse four. Well, the verse three, we know the kingdom of God can only come from God. Verse four, they shall be comforted, those who mourn. Well, if you've been to a funeral, if you've experienced this grief for sin in your life, you know that your only hope, the only true blessing can come from God.

Who has destroyed the power of sin and who has destroyed the power of death and instead is the giver of life. It's only God himself who can give us an inheritance of the world.

They shall they shall inherit the earth. And this is a new heaven, a new earth that God will one day bring. It is only God who can satisfy us. The things that are our deep longings for God.

He satisfies our appetite for him. He gives us his mercy and his forgiveness. And they are eternal mercies and forgiveness. And most wonderfully, what this means in verse eight is that they shall see God.

And this is something that I think changes our life. This is the immense privilege and fortune that is ahead for those who have come to God with empty hands.

[16 : 26] He makes them God's sons and daughters by the forgiveness of sins. And what this means is the central blessing that is promised to all people in the kingdom. They shall see God.

That is the deepest yearning of everyone in the kingdom of God, that they will see him. And you know what the Bible says? It says these powerful blessings are such that they change us.

And so the Bible says that even if you hope the hope of seeing God, seeing Jesus as he is, which is promised to us, that hope purifies you. It actually cleanses you spiritually to have that hope.

And so as we've gone through those beatitudes, I want to come back to the beginning of it again as we near the end of the sermon. And that is that the first beatitude is, as I said, the key to all of them because of the fact that it tells us that God requires one thing from us.

And that is open and empty hands. It is actually being able to say, I am spiritually bankrupt and I need what God only can give.

[17 : 36] That's the one qualification of the kingdom, bringing your sin to the table. And it is to know in that sense, being poor in spirit, that we are impossibly far from God and only Jesus can bring us to him so that we can be God's friend.

There's a humbling thing about that, about coming with empty hands to God, because in these beatitudes, we see that as we are poor in spirit and mourning our sins and meekly relying on him, hungering and thirsting for him.

It is then that Jesus fills us with the riches of the kingdom, which are the last four beatitudes. In other words, he gives to us mercy so that we are merciful.

He makes us pure so we can be devoted to him. He makes us to be peacemakers. We receive his peace and we bless the world by giving peace to it.

And so and I think that that in a sense that baptism that we just saw, the seven baptisms that we just saw are pictures of this. Because all those children are coming with empty hands, aren't they?

[18 : 47] They don't have sort of a spiritual bank account set up. I mean, they're not fooled in the thinking that they have that, even though we are. They don't they come to God with empty hands, very dependent upon their parents.

Some of them are not even conscious of what is happening to them today. They will never remember it. But what happens as they are coming with empty hands is that the promises of Jesus are proclaimed to each of those children.

Each of them is hearing about the forgiveness of sins, about eternal life, about the fact that we can be friends with God and become part of the kingdom of God because of what Jesus has done for them.

And in faith, we as a congregation are praying that these babies and these children will one day receive all the blessings of God in his or her empty hands.

In other words, they were consciously received coming to God, poor in spirit. They will come receive the kingdom of God that is so near to them in Jesus Christ.

[19 : 53] And so as we close the sermon, you know, there's a couple of things that that that come up here. Number one, if you believe that you are not in the kingdom of heaven now, the only thing that this passage says that is keeping you away from that kingdom.

Freedom is if you say you don't need God. It's telling us simply that it is empty hands that are what God requires of us.

The world says you need to look like a good person. You need to look religious and have the good background in order to be received by God. Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit.

Those who know they only bring their sin to the table and they receive everything in return. So there's a call for you to come in by humility.

And secondly, for all of us, there is a real call here to be thankful. Jesus is emphasizing over and over again because we are hard hearted.

[20 : 57] Many times when we are surrounded by blessings, we are forgetful. And Jesus is reminding us over and over again in these ten in these few verses that we ought to be thankful.

We are privileged. We are rewarded because of what God has done for us. And that was the great character of the apostles. It was gratitude. In fact, they would be so thankful that they would rejoice at being called worthy to suffer for Jesus Christ.

Now, that's a spirit of thankfulness. And it's something that we need to reclaim over and over again in the church by remembering the blessings of the kingdom that are ours in Jesus.

And then finally, the last challenge to us is this, that every day we are faced with choices. And this passage calls you and I to a choice every day.

Will you live according to the prevailing thought and values of this culture? Or instead, will you live according to the values of the kingdom of heaven, which God gives to all those who call on him?

[22 : 06] You see, Jesus is congratulating here the very things the culture looks down on. So we have this huge gulf. And God is calling us here in his word to allow him to turn your life upside down every day and to know the lasting blessing of following him.

Amen.