

# The beatitudes - how we should live in the world

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[ 0 : 00 ] More importantly, how much of it do we remember? Now, it's interesting if we take remembrance in Scripture, remembrance is a duty, not a faculty of the mind. Remembrance is not about how good you are at remembering. Remembrance is an activity that you're meant to do. That's why forgetting in Scripture before God is a sin. You know, we want to say that forgetfulness is an absence of mind, but whenever a parent tells their child off for forgetting, they continue to tell their child off because they recognize that forgetfulness is not an excuse. You can't use that one. Well, if a child can't use it against a parent, oh, I forgot, then what they're actually doing is, I failed to remember, I've not been responsible in what I should remember, then it's equally the case that Christians have a duty to remember. And it is no excuse to say, I forgot, is that it's an absence of mind.

Remembering what Jesus taught is also a matter of the heart, not just a matter of the mind, as though it's just from the outside in. It's also from the inside out, that we are to store these words of Christ up in our heart so that they come out in our life. If we use the other approach of just trying to fill our life all the time with this, that, and the other, the failing is a fairly obvious one. And that is, if it's going in and we're not retaining it, then it's not really going in. It's not really being stored anywhere. It's just going through, you know, as we might say to a child, in one ear and out the other. So when Jesus preaches, we are a duty bound to take the words of Jesus when he says, let him who have ears to hear, to actually hear. And hearing means to recall, to remember, to take to heart. Now, it's clearly obvious that when Jesus preaches this sermon, people are amazed at his authority. There's no doubt about that at all. They're also amazed at his clarity. Jesus has a habit of saying, especially in this sermon, you have heard it said, but I say unto you. And I think that's a classic example of just how important it is to get things right. You've heard it said, but what you've heard is not correct. You've heard it said, but now I say unto you. Jesus never contradicts the Old Testament, but he does point out where people have misunderstood it or have come to understand it in a different way than it's meant to be understood from the beginning. It seems to me that despite the amount of technology that we have now with Bibles on phones, with sermons able to be recorded, able to be videoed, it's still possible for people to miss the point of a sermon or at least change it. And it would be nice to say, or it would be bad enough to say in one sense that this only happens to the sermons that God puts in men to preach to congregations. But it's even worse when it's happened to the very sermon Jesus preached. You know, how many people change his sermon? And the answer is quite a lot. It's further sad when the sermon is changed in the Bible itself. Some words are substituted for other words, such as blessed can be translated in, or it's been substituted in some Bibles for the word happy.

[ 3 : 46 ] But this is to miss the point entirely. The issue here that we're addressing is the blessing of God. And one word cannot be substituted for another word, and it still means the same thing.

The beginning of Jesus' sermon has become to known as the Beatitudes because it focuses here clearly on blessings, or blessed are those. But I have read at least a couple of versions where it says happier those. That is, I think, very upsetting at the least. The reason it's upsetting is not only because it changes the words that Jesus was intending to convey, but it changes the meaning for the Christians reading it. You end up with something quite different than if you take the word as blessed. Happy are those who mourn. Really? Happy are those who are poor in spirit. Are you sure about that? Happy are those who are poor in spirit? Happy are those who are poor in spirit? Happy are those who are poor in spirit? And so on. Really? The other issue is that there's a big difference between blessedness and happiness, and we'll get to that in a moment. And so by way of introduction, I want us to point out a few important key understandings. Number one, the sermon itself is not about how you become a Christian. The Sermon on the Mount was never intended to be

taken by people who are not Christians to know how to become a Christian. That's not to say, however, upon hearing the Sermon on the Mount, you couldn't become a Christian. Rather, this sermon, as you'll notice in verse 1, is intended for the disciples. It is preached to the disciples. Now, it just so happens to be that there are other people who are listening. And of course, when Jesus preaches, you're going to get that, that believe the disciples are listening, but other people are going to be listening as well.

But the sermon itself is intended for disciples. So immediately, we're beginning to realize that what is being taught here has to do with a Christian life rather than how to become a Christian. It has to do with how you are to live as one of God's people in this world rather than how you become one of God's people in this world. This is why when Jesus makes distinctions like, you are the salt and the light in this world. But what's the distinction? The distinction, you are this in a world full of darkness. He's addressing his disciples. He's saying what they're like, what Christian believers are to be like in this world. Now, he does point out a third person, and that's the religious person. And he makes a distinction there also. But this sermon is for all those who belong to Jesus. It's for all those who are already Christians. It's for those who already belong to the kingdom. To put it another way, if I asked you to study the culture in Nagaland, which is a country, or let's choose a slightly different country, Butan, if I asked you to study the culture, well, one of the things that you would do is you would perhaps go there. You would read about it.

You'd read about the country. You'd read about the people in the country. You'd read about their culture, their beliefs, their understanding, what they eat, what they do, right? And then you'd come away and you'd have a fairly good, a fairly good understanding, at least surface understanding, of their culture. Well, the Sermon of the Mount is exactly the same thing. If you want to know what God's people look like in the world, here they are. Now, Jesus, we have to point out, is preaching this to his disciples. And there's a lesson there. Why do they need to hear what they are like? Well, because it's easy for a believer to forget their identity and to live like their previous identity.

Okay? The old is seeping through into the new, and that should never be the case. So, the issue here is that this is what God's people look like in a fallen world, in a world that perhaps doesn't want to know God, doesn't want to know God, in a world that in one sense is being renewed, but in another sense is coming to an end, and both can happen at the same time. And more importantly, that those who do belong to the kingdom will inherit the kingdom. You know, there is a future inheritance for every single one of us who belong to Jesus. Here's another point worth pointing out. Christians are not allowed to specialize. Okay? It's tempting for a Christian to specialize in, like, I'm really good at this, or I'm really good at that. Now, it may be the case that your gift is hospitality, and that is a speciality, and if you have that, then God bless you, and may God bless you more in that. It could be the case that somebody else's gift is something quite different from that.

[ 8 : 57 ] That's fine. But here, we're not allowed to specialize with the Beatitudes, as if we can say, well, I'm going to choose that Beatitude rather than that one. What Jesus is addressing here is the fact that this is the complete character of a complete believer. Now, it may be the fact that we may be stronger in some areas than others, granted, but nevertheless, the Beatitudes is the description of a believer, not of different types of believers, as though one believer is blessed when they mourn, another believer is blessed when they're persecuted, and so forth and so on. This here is a description of how God's people respond to God and to the world. It's the complete picture, or at least here, that Jesus is giving us of what a Christian looks like. So, it doesn't matter where you go in the world. It doesn't even matter what country you're in, okay? Believe it or not, and this may be hard for your ears, perhaps even harder for your heart, English believers should look like

Scottish believers, okay? Irish believers should look like Scottish believers. The only ones who may be slightly different would be those Cornish ones, who are living in the promised land and therefore ultimately blessed in a greater way. No. The issue here is that despite our differences, whatever our differences are, if you're a Christian, there has to be some things that are exactly the same. In fact, there has to be many things that are exactly the same, okay? And the Christian culture, the Christian community transcends every other people group in the world because it incorporates every other people group in the world, okay? It brings in every culture in the world, puts them together into a new Christian community, and there you have whatever differences they may have by their country and culture, come with them, but they also, as they come, they get this new identity. We all get this new identity in Christ. The Beatitudes is part of them. You'll also notice, hopefully, that the Beatitudes are remarkably similar in their structure as the Ten Commandments. Now, if you

read the Ten Commandments carefully, you'll notice that the first few concentrate on your relationship with God and the last amount concentrate on your relationship with your neighbour, with others. In the same way, the Beatitudes are exactly the same. The first four Beatitudes concentrate specifically on your relationship with God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. All of those are God-centered and God-focused. They're all pointing towards God. But the remaining ones, the ones that come after that, are all to do with how you live in the world. How you live in the world. There's something else here that might be worth pointing out, and it's only a little thing, but it's interesting how the Beatitudes are spoken from a mountain.

And the Ten Commandments were given from the mountain. And in fact, as we'll see, the Great Commission was given from a mountain. There's something about mountains in Scripture. Matthew ends with Jesus preaching on a mountain at the beginning, and ends, sorry, with Jesus preaching on a mountain at the mountain at the end. He gives them the Great Commission. There's a top and tail here of Jesus preaching from the mountains. So here's a few distinctions then that we need to make. Why blessedness rather than happiness? Okay, there is a distinction that someone once said that God wants you to be holy. He's not too concerned about your happiness. Well, I don't know who said it, but it's just not true. Anybody who is holy in the way that God wants them to be is automatically going to be happy right along with it. The happiness is hand in hand with holiness. Those who think that holiness is boring, you know, that it's hard work or it's a chore, haven't actually tasted it yet.

They've perhaps tasted substitutes, but they've not tasted and seen the real thing. So here's a first distinction. There's a massive distinction, not only between happiness and blessedness, but also between pleasure and happiness. You can buy pleasure. You can't buy happiness. People think, well, I can buy myself a big car and a big house and a big yacht and that will make me happy. No, what they're missing is that they're buying pleasure. And as Jim Carrey once said, I wish, I wish everybody could be rich and famous so that they could know that that's not the answer. I want everybody to be rich and famous so that they could know that's not the answer. He understood, even in his atheistic position, that there's a big difference between pleasure, the pursuit of pleasure, and in fact, even the time limit on that pleasure, you know, you can pay for your pleasure to continue, and happiness. Pleasure can be manipulated. It can be, it can manipulate you. And so there's a lot of people in the world who are chasing pleasure thinking that they're chasing happiness and that's, they're just not the same. They're not even close to being the same. And when Christians aren't happy, guess what they do? They don't, they don't search for blessedness. They search for pleasure. Because we all, we all need, we all need, if we're not in the context of a close and clean relationship with God, we all need a fix, okay? And it's, and it's a lot quicker and easier to go to the world and get a dose, a fix of pleasure, whatever it is, just whether it's buying something in the shops that we don't even need, whether it's searching online and clicking through a load of images and buying, oh, I'll have that and I'll have that, that we don't even, we don't even, whatever it is, you know, it's a bit like going to the supermarket when you're hungry.

[15:18] I'm not allowed to go to the supermarket anymore with my wife, especially when I'm hungry, because I'm always going, well, what does that taste like? Oh, let's, let's, and suddenly the shopping bill is several times more than it needs to be because my desire, oh, that looks good. I wonder what it tastes like. And you bring it home, it sits in the cupboard for weeks, then it's gone out a day and you think, well, I'm just, right? Who hasn't been there? Who hasn't been, who hasn't been in that position where we need something to get us through? Well, that's because we're not filled up, we are picking pleasure. Happiness, however, does have roots. Happiness does have roots. It grows over time, it can increase, but it can also, it's fragile sometimes. Happiness ebbs and flows with your emotion. You know, some days you wake up happy, other days you wake up unhappy, some days you start the day happy, you finish the day sad, or it may be the other way around. Happiness ebbs and flows.

But one of the situations here, or rather one of the distinctions here that you should clearly see, is blessedness doesn't do that. It's not short term, it's not a fix, it's not ebb and flow on your emotion, and it doesn't come from you, more importantly. Okay? It doesn't come from you, it comes from God. And that's the crucial, that's the crucial issue there. Happiness, even happiness either comes from you or it comes from other people. But here, blessedness is something that only God can give.

So those who have a scripture that says, happier those who are poor in spirit, are missing two things in particular. If you've come to believe that it should be happier those rather than blessed are those, I want to point out to you graciously, but at least firmly, that the issue is not happiness but blessedness. So here's the reason. If you think it's happiness, there's two issues going on. One, you think happiness is the same as blessedness. Two, you don't understand what poor in spirit means. Because if you did, you wouldn't be happy. I've never met a single person who is poor in spirit and happy about it. Not one. Even though the kingdom of God might be theirs, they're not happy if they're poor in spirit. Here's why. Because to be poor in spirit is for a person to recognize their own spiritual bankruptcy. In other words, before God, I can't fill myself up. I've tried with the pleasures of the world. I've tried with a number of other things, but I just can't seem to get there. Every time I go looking for the thing that I've stored, it's just not there anymore. The pleasure that I had yesterday cannot be repeated today. It's gone. Unless I go ahead and get it again. But it's a bit like eating the same meal over and over again because you enjoyed it the first time. Well, the first time you really did enjoy it, but by the fifth time I can guarantee you're not going to enjoy it quite so much. There's something about the repetition of even good pleasures that diminish over time and even over a short amount of time. Pleasures don't last. So for a person who is poor in spirit, they're the people who recognize that. They're the people who recognize that spiritually, despite what they may have tried in the world, they're still empty. And they're not happy about it. Happy are those who are poor in spirit. They're not happy. You would never be happy being spiritually bankrupt. You would never be happy having a spiritual depression. You would never be happy lacking the spiritual quality. That's not a condition of happiness. Blessed are those who are that way. Why? Why would a person be blessed rather than happy in that situation? Well, because God fills them up. They're blessed because despite their situation, God is able to do something about it. And that's the distinction here. The person who is poor in spirit, as an example, we could use other examples, is spiritually depressed, is run down, is empty. And we all get like that. Okay, we all get like that. Let's not kid ourselves.

It's just that some people prop themselves up with a lot more pleasures because either they can afford them or they've got a social network in order to perform them other ways. But the issue here that what God is giving us is blessedness, not happiness. Now, it is true that blessedness leads to happiness, but the blessedness that leads to happiness is a result of blessedness. It doesn't precede the blessedness. It comes after it. Now, because we must deal fairly with the text, any of you who know Greek, and I know that a few of you in here do, will go, well, hang on a minute, Daniel. The Greek here, *marikos*, means happy. Well, the Greek here, *marikos*, is an implication of the text, not a presentation of it.

And by that, it means it is true that a blessed person will be a happy person. Okay, it is true that a blessed person will be a happy person. It is true that a holy person will be a happy person. But they don't get to holiness through happiness. Not always. You don't get to blessedness through happiness. Some of you are persecuted. Some of you are poor in spirit. Some of you are meek. Some of you are hunger and thirsting after righteousness. Some of you have a great struggle, spiritual struggle, on your hands. And there's not a great deal of happiness there, but there is blessing.

[ 21 : 21 ] And the blessing in turns, when you know that you are blessed by God, the blessing in turns leads to happiness. Because now, I feel emotionally different because I know what is true. Okay?

When I look at my life in this world, we're having a conversation about this before the service started, bit of tongue-in-cheek, that every single day is full of sadness and misery and it doesn't seem to change much. That that's, by and large, that's, you know, I get, I have more of those days sometimes than I do of others. You know? You wake up, there is that deep, dark cloud that descends, and you don't know what to do about it. Right? And I'm thankful that God still loves miserable Christians. Right? I'm thankful that God still loves depressed Christians. I'm thankful that God still loves me when I don't feel like telling him that I love him. I'm thankful for that. Why? Because I'm blessed. I'm not happy. Okay? I can be blessed and not happy. But it's impossible, I think, for a person to be truly happy, at least happiness defined by God, and not be blessed. I just don't see that happen. The person who considers their blessing is the person who is then changed emotionally. I really do believe that the Beatitudes can change us emotionally, but we can't change emotionally without being blessed. Okay? I don't think that, I don't think you can make yourself

happy, but you're buying pleasure. Okay? It wears off really, really quickly. So who are the blessed? This is the more important question. Who are the blessed, and how can you be? Well, the answer to how can you be is a simple one. You must belong to God. And God blesses those who belong to him. It's really that simple. Well, what do they do to get the blessing? Well, nothing. Nothing. They simply belong to God. What do you mean? I can belong to God, do nothing, and just receive everything. That's what it means. That's what it means to belong to God. It means that you who are poor in spirit, nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling. I have nothing, and God has everything. God has everything. If we were to summarize the Beatitude, Jesus is effectively saying that live like this in the world. More importantly, you can live like this in the world because you are blessed, and you are blessed because you belong, and you belong because God gave his son into the world, God. If you were to trace it all the way back. Is it possible then to forego the blessings of God?

[ 24 : 18 ] I think obviously. There is no doubt that just because God stands there with open hands wanting to give, that automatically you are there receiving. I don't think that's the case at all. I don't think it's the case that a child of five years old who likes playing football out in the back garden gets to enjoy his tea while he's still out in the back garden playing football. It just doesn't make any, at some point in order to enjoy it, he has to come in, sit down, and eat the meal. Okay, we tend to think that God would just pour it into us, like you see these airplanes, you know, refueling in mid-air.

The plane's still flying while another plane is filling it up with more gasoline or whatever it is. That makes planes fly. Magic. Who knows? I don't understand why they stay in the air, do you?

But God doesn't do that. There's so many passages in scripture where he says, wait upon me. Sit down, be quiet. Do nothing other than wait. Why? Because in the same way, in the same way that it is possible to eat your tea on the go. Okay, it is possible to do that, isn't it? Okay.

But this is perhaps where the analogy of the illustration breaks down. Okay. God wants us to sit down at his table. He wants to bless us. He wants us to finish. Don't leave until you've finished. And then he says, off you go. Okay. The blessedness is the place where we vertically come before God and are filled up because we're poor in spirit. We have nothing. In other words, it doesn't take long, even for what we do have, to run out. And this is why we need to come back to God all the time.

Okay. To put it, if you take this into consideration of the prodigal son, you'll notice that the prodigal son did not return to the father the day after he left. And you all know why, don't you?

Because he still had money in his pocket. The money didn't run out on day one. Okay. And there's a lot of people living in this world, very similar to me, the time that I jumped off the highest point of the harbour at Charlestown, which was quite some time. You know, 20 foot into the jump, 20 foot down, I was thinking to myself, it's all right so far. You know, another 10 foot and suddenly I hit the water.

[ 26 : 50 ] Suddenly, everything changed. Okay. There's a lot of people living in this world like the prodigal son. There's a lot of Christians living in this world like the prodigal son who think it's all right so far. It's all right. I've got money in my pocket, money halfway down. It's all right so far. Well, I understand that it's all right so far. But what are you going to do when it's run out and you're a long, long way from home? What are you going to do then? So the blessed people other people who are close and clean with God, who are poor in spirit, recognizing their poverty and are coming to God, receiving for theirs is the kingdom. God gives. So here's the exhortation.

Jesus here is describing how we should live in this world. And living in this world is difficult. Jesus is also describing the qualities and values that are to be found in every believer's life.

You're not allowed to pick and choose which ones you want, however tempting that might be. It's also the case that some of you are going to be better at some things than you are at other things. And that's not sin. That's just the way God made you. But qualities and virtues are not acts of skill. They're acts or rather qualities of character. And they're bestowed upon you by God. But they do, or they can, unless you have a close and clean relationship with God, diminish, run out. You think of Solomon. Do you know when Solomon's problems started?

Up until he was 40, okay, he was fine. Okay, you take Proverbs, it was written pre-40, before he had all the troubles. You take a lot of the other, it was fine. But the moment he turned 40, something about turning 40, I don't know. You know, and I'm a few years past that now.

Now you're in the danger zone. Why? Because when you're old, when you're young, you have nothing to throw away. When you're old, you do. And I've known men throw away 20-year marriages, 30-year marriages. You know, and don't get me stuck on the useful or uselessness of men now. I mean, that's another example. But I'll go easy on you today.

[ 29 : 20 ] What do they do? Well, when you have something, you have it to throw away. And the only reason you wouldn't throw it away is because you have someone constantly telling you, don't do that, don't do that. That's God. We need to stay close to God, because everything that we have in God remains us, stays in us by us belonging to God. This is why that once we receive Christ, we receive every blessing that comes with Christ, because it's a whole deal.

But when you're outside of the Christ, not only do you not enjoy the very virtues and blessings that God have, because you can't, because you're outside of him. So here's the conclusion. It is possible for you as a believer to understand that God reigns and to experience that God reigns in your life. But you also are to understand that God is reigning over the whole world.

And God blesses his people in a world that rejects him. And the way God blesses his people is because they are his people. And the way you become his people is by belonging to his son. God blesses you because you are his. It is that simple. Now, when you receive God's blessing, that'll lead you to happiness. Because there's plenty of things in the world and in our lives that'll make us unhappy. Plenty of things. But blessing can lead to happiness. It's not necessarily happiness itself. When Jesus preaches the sermon here, it is clearly obvious that it's full of distinctions. He's salt and light all the way through. You know, the wise builder and the foolish builder. All the way through, you have these distinctions. And therefore, the new life that you have is not like a new car. You know, the new car does almost exactly the same as the old car.

[ 31 : 24 ] It may run a little better. It may go a little further. It may have a CD player rather than a tape machine. But essentially, it does the same thing. If you think of the Christian life in that way, you've missed the point entirely. Because that's not what you have in the blessed life that God gives.

If you do, one of the mistakes that you make is that wherever your biblical knowledge is failing, you copy and paste from your old life into the new. In other words, because I'm not sure what my biblical response should be or what my Christian response should be to this, I copy and paste what I previously knew in my old life into the new one and go, well, that will do. And why?

Why will that do? Well, it won't. I guess to miss the point entirely. Jesus is saying how to live in this world. Now, if we knew how to live in this world, Jesus wouldn't need to preach the sermon, would he? And we wouldn't need to remember the sermon, would we? But we don't know how to live. We need to be told how to live. We need to be told what to think. We need to be told what to believe. We need to be told how to act. Why? Because God wants us to keep us close and clean with him. Why? Because if we don't, we go off the rails.

God has a way of addressing our misunderstandings. Jesus had a way by saying, you have heard it said, but I say unto you, correcting us along the way. So here's the final thought.

You are blessed in this world because God blesses you. Whether you see the blessing or not, you are blessed presently and you will be blessed in the future.

[ 33 : 16 ] You cannot even begin to imagine what God has prepared for you in the future kingdom that he has for you to inherit. You can't even get close to even begin to imagine just how good it'll be.

But not every blessing is futuristic. There is a blessing now that comes with staying close to God. By recognizing your spiritual bankruptcy, by recognizing the need for meekness, by recognizing the need for being hunger and thirsting after righteousness, by being merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, not peacekeepers, peacemakers. For such people were these and those who are persecuted. There is blessing. There is blessing. But the blessing comes from God and comes from God in God's ways. So know this, that as you live the life the way God called us to, and the life that God has given us, that life, if lived that way, will be blessed. Amen.