

The Beatitudes

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[0 : 00] I'd like to start off with a question. So if someone asked you to define what it means to be a Christian, what would you say? Maybe you'd think of some Bible verses about having faith in Jesus Christ and believing that he died on the cross to forgive sins.

Maybe you'd think about repenting and believing in Jesus. Or maybe you'd speak about someone going to church because they want to know God more and show them, show him their devotion to him and their love for other people.

But I wonder how many of us would talk firstly about some of our actions and some of our attitudes. Tonight we're going to be looking at the Beatitudes and what we see in them is God's blueprint for the Christian life.

God's blueprint for the Christian life. So if you're here this evening and you are a Christian, then these things should be the attitudes and actions that characterize who you are.

Now this passage is very well known and we'll read it in a moment as we go through. But familiarity should not stop us from reading it and being amazed. Absolutely blown away by the greatness of God who freely grants these wonderful blessings to his people.

[1 : 27] But we must understand that this is not a list of good works that will get us into heaven. This is not a list of things that we can do to earn salvation, but this is a list of characteristics for the Christian.

If we are followers of Jesus, this is how we should be living. Martin Luther said this about the Sermon on the Mount. Christ is saying nothing in this sermon about how we become Christians, but only about the works and fruits that no one can do unless he is already a Christian and in a state of grace.

I, for one, this week found this passage very challenging. And the question I've been asking myself is, am I really living this lifestyle for the glory of Christ?

You'll see in your Bibles that verses 3 to 11 all start with that same word, blessed. Blessed. Now, blessed is an interesting word that has been changed by our world, hasn't it?

Blessed. People use the word blessed today when they feel exceptionally prosperous. When they're experiencing happiness or joy.

[2 : 42] People say they're blessed when they get married, when they have a child, when they get a promotion, when they get a new job. But all of these things are finite. All of them are temporary like everything else in this world.

That understanding of blessed is man-made and it is man-focused. Blessed means to be in God's favor.

And the word here in the Beatitudes is actually maybe better translated as happy. But this happiness is not a temporary feeling that is there one second and gone the next.

This happiness is the unchangeable state that a Christian has before God. He has favor. They have favor in his sight. And this is important to know as we look at the Beatitudes.

Because this happiness or status as Christian. And the Beatitudes are God's pattern for happiness. As the slide says behind me.

[3 : 44] This is God's blueprint for the Christian life. The only way that we can do these eight things listed in this passage. Is if we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Helping us to live obediently. Otherwise, we are simply living moral lives. And we're sellotaping fake fruit to the dead trees that are living contrary to God.

The only way we can live the Beatitudes is by the power of God in us. Who has taken us from being dead in our sins to being alive in Christ.

So I think generally the Beatitudes can split into three sections. Verses 3 to 6 are a Christian's attitude or response to God. That flow out of our relationship with Jesus. Verses 7 to 9 are a Christian's attitude or response to other people. That flow out of our relationship with Jesus. And verses 10 to 12 are people's response to Christians.

[4 : 50] That flow out of our relationship with Jesus. So let's walk through these verses and we'll read them as we go. And be blown away by the privilege that it is to be a Christian.

The privilege of being given that status of blessed or eternally happy in Christ. And if you're not a Christian this evening, think about these things.

Think about these promises that are being worked out in the life of every Christian. And the promises of future reward. And consider where you stand before a holy God this evening.

So verse 3 says, Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now there is no coincidence that this is the first Beatitude. Because this is the starting point from which every other Beatitude flows.

This is the starting point for every person when they become a Christian. Why? Well because only when we are poor in spirit do we cry out to God for help.

[5 : 54] Now this isn't talking about financial poverty. Jesus isn't saying that all of his disciples and followers must be poor. But think about the consequences of being poor.

In the time that this was written it would have meant a life of begging. And being dependent on others to provide for you. Is that what Jesus is calling Christians to?

Well in a sense yes. When you hear the call of Jesus on your life from Matthew chapter 4 verse 17 where it says, Repent for the kingdom of God has come near.

It leads you to the point where you realize that you as a person are sinful. Broken. Corrupt. And that you can do absolutely nothing to earn your salvation.

It is at that point when people are poor in spirit and then they are spiritually bankrupt before God. And it is at that point that we realize that we can do nothing.

[7 : 00] And we come before God and confess our insufficiency. But we don't leave the place spiritually bankrupt. Those who have come to the end of themselves recognize their own sinfulness.

They turn to God and repent. And what do they find? Everlasting happiness. Because as the end of verse 3 says, Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What state is your soul in this evening? Have you become proud that you're a Christian?

Have we started to become numb to our own sinfulness? Or are we still in that place of spiritual bankruptcy and we rely wholeheartedly on God to save us?

Being poor in spirit is not just the starting place of every Christian. But it should be the identity that characterizes our entire life.

[7 : 59] Because we should never think that we contribute anything to being saved. But our lives should be marked by absolute dependence on God. As the old hymn says, Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

Naked come to thee for dress. Helpless look to thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die.

That is the cry of someone who is poor in spirit. And theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The next beatitude. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Do you see how logical this is? What do you expect people to do when they realize their weakness, their inability to save themselves? Clap and sing for joy? Jump up and down for excitement?

No. We expect them to mourn. Now when people mourn, they want to be comforted, don't they?

When a loved one dies, all you want is a hug and someone to tell you that everything is going to be okay.

[9 : 08] When the doctor's given you that bad news, you want to be comforted. When you've had your whole world taken away from you, you want comfort.

And the wonderful news about verse 4 is that not only is this a good kind of mourning, but that the comfort that we receive is not temporary, but it is everlasting.

The reason for the mourning is because of what we've just seen in verse 3. The Christian mourns over their sinfulness. We lament over our broken and rebellious hearts.

We should be sorrowful and we should weep at the sin in our life before a holy God, but we are not left hopeless. Because God comforts his people and that word doesn't quite grasp the immensity of the comfort that we receive.

Jesus doesn't just come alongside and pat us on the back and give us a pep talk. He doesn't look at our pain from a distance and act like a comforting cheerleader.

[10:18] But Jesus gets on his hands and knees in the misery that we feel. And he weeps with us because of our sin, but he takes the burden on himself and he gifts us his righteousness.

As Christians, we are comforted because our sin, the thing that made us rebel against God, has been deemed powerless by Christ on the cross. That is the comfort that will never, ever grow faint. A truth that will never grow old and an inheritance that will never perish. Our comfort is everlasting because our comforter, our savior is everlasting.

Verse 5. Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. Now meekness is not weakness, but it is power under control.

The word for meek could be translated as gentle. That doesn't mean that Christians are to be, as we say in Scotland, a softy. Or that we are to be a doormat for the world.

[11:30] But it means that as Christians, we should be humble and fully submit to serve God, to his will for our lives.

It means that we humbly serve and have courage and conviction as we live our lives obediently for Christ. The world tells us that we can do anything, whatever we want.

That you need to look after number one. That you're the only one that really matters. And sure, living that way might make you feel good. It might grant you some success in this life.

But what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? Those who humbly, submissively and meekly serve God with every single area of their lives will inherit the earth.

Now sadly, I don't have time to go into everything that that means, but I'd encourage you later on to go home and read Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 to 3 and Genesis 13 verses 14 to 17.

[12:38] Because verse 5 of Matthew 5 is a fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant promises where God's people will live in God's place under God's rule.

And we know that glorious future to be the new creation that we see in Revelation chapter 21 and 22. Blessed are those who hunger and who thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

So if you're a Christian, then your deep desire should be to become more and more like Jesus Christ every single day and by God's grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, that happens.

It is a process that is lifelong. But we are not to be passive in this process. We are to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

So this is not a casual sense of wanting, maybe like you feel now as you're thinking, when I get home, I want a curry or I want a pizza. But this is a deep set sense of hunger and thirst.

[13:49] Imagine you've just hiked up a mountain on a hot day and you cannot wait to pick up that water bottle or that plate of food. But when that happens, you're not going to look at those things and go towards them calmly, are you?

That water bottle will be empty in seconds and woe to anyone who tries to touch that plate of food. Your body has a deep longing and need for nourishment and you'll do anything to get it.

And that is the attitude that Christians should have when it comes to our desire to be holy, to have more and more of God's righteousness. And the wonderful news is that we've been given it.

As Christians, we have been declared righteous when we came to Christ. Jesus took our sinfulness and gave us his righteousness. And so as we continue in that deep hunger and thirst for more and more of that holiness and righteousness in our lives, Jesus says at the end of verse six, you will be satisfied.

So that's the first little section. And in verses seven to nine, Jesus speaks about three attitudes or responses to other people that should result from our relationship with him.

[15:13] Look at verse seven. Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. Now as Christians, we have been shown the ultimate mercy because God will not give the Christians the punishment that we deserve for a life of rebellion and rejection of God.

All of those who put their trust in Jesus have been forgiven and that mercy is evident because he bore, Jesus bore God's wrath and judgment, meaning that we can be free to serve him.

And therefore, because we have been shown the greatest mercy that ever has been known and ever will be known in this, world, we too are called to be merciful.

Jesus is calling us to have compassion on other people, but he doesn't give us particular situations that we're to be merciful in or particular people groups that we're to be merciful to because we are

to be merciful to all people in all circumstances.

Think to the well-known parable of the good Samaritan, the Samaritan who cared for the beaten and injured Israelite, even though in the world's standards, they were complete enemies.

[16:31] He is the one who is shown to be merciful. He is the one that we should be like. We should be merciful. And we recognize that we are recipients of God's mercy.

Therefore, therefore, we should be merciful and we will be shown mercy. This doesn't mean that we can earn our salvation, but it means that as we live out our Christian life before the eyes of a watching world, as we are merciful to people, God will be merciful to us and show us the ultimate mercy and take us to be in his presence for an eternity.

Blessed are those, blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Or a fun little paraphrase, happy are the holy.

This means that as Christians, our heart, our whole being, our mind, our will, our emotions should be pursuing holiness and purity in every single area of our lives.

The desire of our heart, of our life, should be to obediently serve God in the way he has called us to and in full view of the world. We are not to hide.

[17:53] The inward holiness that we have been given by Jesus should be exemplified by an outward holiness that is on display for the world to see. And if we live according to the Bible, that will happen naturally.

People will realize that we are different. Our friends, our families, our colleagues, our employers and our employees should all be able to tell that we are followers of Jesus because we are pure in heart and because we tell people why we're different.

If that is the case, then the wonderful promise is that we will see God. Meaning that as Jesus returns and every eye sees him, we will go to be with him for an eternity.

Revelation 22 verse 4 says, we will see God. Verse 9, blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.

We live in a world that is constantly fighting. The message is climb and promote yourself above everybody else. Don't care about other people.

[19:15] Politicians make fun of each other and they argue on live television for the whole nation and world to laugh at them. Work colleagues stab each other in the back to look good in front of the boss.

Family members quarrel over meaningless things. And it is into that setting that Jesus calls his followers to be peacemakers.

Peacemakers in the community and in the church. We should be peacemakers because Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker. Colossians 1 verses 19 to 20 says this, through him to reconcile, so this is God speaking about saving his people, through him to reconcile to himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven.

How? By making peace through his blood shed on the cross. We make peace because Jesus made the ultimate peace between us and God.

When was the last time you were a peacemaker? When was the last time you promoted peace?

This should characterize our everyday lives, how we respond at work, how we respond to criticism, to slander, and how we interact with people online and on social media.

[20:46] Are we peacemakers? Now again, being a peacemaker doesn't mean that we become people's doormats or that we sit back and let anything happen simply because we want to keep the peace.

we are still to be pure in heart and live holy lives. So when we see that things are wrong, when we see people are teaching wrong things about God or promoting a false gospel, we need to speak up. But the attitude that should characterize everything and govern everything that we do, even when we confront people, should be peace. we should be confronting to reconcile people.

So those are three attitudes or responses that all Christians should have to other people that result from our relationship with Jesus.

And Jesus now moves on to speak about people's response to Christians because of their relationship with Jesus in verses 10 to 12.

[21:59] Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Now this is all one beatitude not two separate ones and we might think that there's two because the word blessed is in there twice but it is just one thing and they are speaking about suffering for Jesus.

Jesus is saying that all of his followers if they live according to his teaching and if they act in a holy and righteous way if they live according to everything we've been thinking about this evening then they will be persecuted.

They will be opposed. We will be persecuted because we're different from the world. We believe in truth.

We live in the light. but the world is in darkness and is deceived and lives the lie that there is no God. Therefore anyone who stands firm and stands up for their faith will be persecuted.

[23 : 27] And so when we are persecuted insulted ridiculed mocked we can rejoice and be glad because we know that God is watching and that one day every single wrong will be made right and we will have our reward in heaven.

So this whole world might seem to be crushing around us and Christianity might seem to be pushed to the fringes but we know that there will be a day when Jesus will return and every eye will see him and praise him for who he is.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. So let me ask us a very challenging question this evening as a whole church but also as individuals.

Are we being persecuted? Are we being opposed? Our tendency is to think that if we aren't being persecuted or facing opposition then we're doing something right.

But that's not true. That's not what we see in scripture. The message that we see in the Bible is that Jesus' followers will face opposition.

[24 : 49] We will suffer. We will be persecuted for our faith. And if we aren't we need to ask ourselves the question are we really being faithful?

So these 12 verses tell us about God's blueprint for the Christian life. And they are full of wonderful promises that we have just skimmed over this evening.

Go away, study them for the next eight weeks and see how much your hunger and thirst for God grows. but will we listen and will we obey?

Will we live according to God's blueprint and share the good news of Jesus with people? We need to always remember that we do none of this in our own strength but we do it for God's glory by God's strength because he enables to do these things by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

let's pray together. Heavenly Father we thank you that in your word you have given us a blueprint you've given us a plan of what it looks like to be a Christian.

[26 : 07] Father forgive us for the times that we have fallen short. Forgive us for the times where we glibly walk through or float through the Christian life without thinking without being devoted and Father we pray that you would help us live obedient lives for your glory for your kingdom until the end of time when you return and draw your people to yourself.

We ask this in Jesus name and for your glory. Amen.