

Blessed

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[0 : 00] words of the Lord Jesus, the words of the living God. Let's pray as we come to them now. Lord, our prayer is simple this morning. Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.

Teach, Lord, for your people are following. It's in Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen. Well, a couple of Sundays ago, we began looking as a church at what is not only undoubtedly Jesus' most famous sermon, but one of the most, if not the most famous and important speech ever given, which we call the Sermon on the Mounts. And a bit like going to see a huge painting in a gallery, we took a week just to stand back and take it all in. Before we step a bit closer and look in at the details, that helped us to see two things, who we're listening to and what we're listening for. We saw Jesus is speaking as our God, our teacher, and our King. And we are listening, if we're Christians, because we are part of His kingdom and we follow Him. That's where those two prayers come from that we prayed just now. Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. That's the who. Teach, Lord, for your people are following. That's the what. And so, today we're here to begin to unpack the sermon itself, which begins with a list of blessings, sometimes called the Beatitudes. Now, you might not know what a Beatitude is, but we know what a blessing is, don't we? Or we think we do. I was in Union Square the other week, and I walked past a poster. On the poster was a woman beaming with delight, absolutely over the moon, because she had been given a Union Square gift card.

[2 : 26] And plastered over the top of this beaming woman was the word in big, bold, pink letters, blessed, blessed. Now, there's some truth in that. The word translated blessed here could be translated happy, but in the context of this word, the happiness is only derivative. The happiness is downstream from the blessing itself, because at its heart, to have someone's blessing is to have their approval. A handful of you brothers have proposed recently, and it's wise often, I don't know if you did this, but it's wise often, isn't it, if you're planning to propose to marry a young lady to seek her father's blessing. And what are you going to ask him for?

What do you want from him? You want his approval. You want his favor. And if he gives the go-ahead, and the young lady you want to marry says yes, well, then you are happy. You're happy. You're delighted.

You're over the moon, because you have now the blessing of those in whose eyes you stand or fall. That's the idea. So, in whose eyes do we stand or fall? Whose approval is it that we ultimately need?

Who can give the blessing that leads to eternal happiness? Who is truly blessed? Well, Jesus tells us eight times at the start of his sermon, and then again a ninth time, who is truly blessed, and he tells us in what ways we are blessed. And every single time, he drops a bombshell that shatters everything that we've been taught to think about what it means to live a blessed life. And so, this morning, here's your project, okay? Perhaps teens, boys and girls, you can do this on paper. The rest of us will do it in our heads. I want us to try and piece together, okay, what kind of poster is it that Jesus is putting together? Okay, who is it in the picture?

Who's the person? Who's the person? What does their life look like? And what have they been given that the word blessed could be plastered over their life? Okay, in our heads, I want us to picture this.

[5 : 16] What kind of person is in Jesus' poster, and what does he give that they could be called blessed? Okay, two questions to help with our poster project this morning. Firstly, who is blessed?

Who is it? Who is the person on the poster, and what is their life like? I was listening to an interview this week with the director of the TV series, The Chosen. Now, I haven't seen it, but it follows the life of Jesus and tries to imagine scenes from the Gospels, imagines other things as well. But the

director of the show was talking about the way that they tried to weave these blessings through the series to try and illustrate something of what Jesus is saying. So, he gave the example of one of Jesus' disciples, Simon the Zealot. He's perhaps a bit of a hothead. In the past, he's been a kind of freedom fighter, and in the series, Jesus says to him, blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. And the director said it was really interesting how many people saw the series and commented on that, that they'd never kind of thought of the Beatitudes as being specifically for the followers of Jesus personally. They'd only ever thought of the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the

Mount as a whole as being for people in general, the world at large. They'd never considered that Jesus could be speaking to them not simply as people, but as his people. Now, that might be a fresh insight for some, maybe for some of you, but it's not a kind of a fresh twist on an old truth. It's not a new interpretation by these creative directors. It's actually exactly how Matthew wants us to hear these blessings in the original. We picked up last time in verse 1 that when Jesus saw the crowds, you know, the people in general, the world at large, he sat down and his disciples, his group of learners or followers came to him and he began to teach them. So, as he speaks, we've got to see a bigger group standing further out, the crowds, and a smaller group standing further in, the disciples. The crowds overhear his teaching. We know that because their brains have exploded by the end of what he's said, but he's speaking first and foremost to those who have a commitment to him that the crowds don't yet have.

Now, perhaps you think that's drawing too clear a line between them and the rest of the world, but just glance down ahead to verse 11, where Jesus says, blessed are you.

Who is the you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me? So, that ninth blessing is a kind of PS to the first eight.

[8 : 46] Those are topped and tailed with the words, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, in verse 3 and 10. The first eight blessings all follow the same pattern. The ninth blessing unpacks what he's just said in the first eight.

And notice, it's not blessed are those who, but blessed are you when. And not simply when you are persecuted for righteousness, but persecuted because of me.

Because of me. Now, think about that. If we stopped at verse 10, we could imagine the sort of person on our poster could be anyone who does nice things or wants a better world and isn't treated fairly.

But in fact, Jesus goes on to say he's speaking to you who suffer because of him. The crowds, they come and go like the tide on a beach.

We'll see that through the gospel. When Jesus is saying things and doing things that they like, they flood towards him. But when the cost goes up, or they begin to suffer because they stick with him, well, they begin to trickle away.

[10 : 02] But his followers, he says, stick close with him even when the tide turns and the cost goes up. And it's to those people that Jesus promises, verse 12, great is your reward in heaven.

It's his committed followers who are truly blessed. Interesting, isn't it, how we can rediscover 2,000 years later what Jesus always intended to say, but is so easily drowned out by a world that wants to claim God's kingdom on its own terms.

We've been trained, haven't we, to hear these words as if Jesus was saying, people are blessed if they are poor. Or people are blessed if they are weak.

Or people are blessed if they want a better world. As if these were the qualifications that we need to get his blessing. And so we think, you know, some people might qualify for Jesus' blessing out there simply because they want a better world.

Or simply because they're ignored or sidelined or oppressed. Whether or not they have any relationship with the king at all, in some way they must receive the blessings of his kingdom.

[11 : 27] But verse 11 makes it really clear that it's completely the other way around. The only condition, the only condition of his blessing is our relationship to him.

Blessed are you, he says, when you stick with me to the point that you lose everything because of me. Do you see, it's all about Jesus.

So Jesus isn't teaching the crowds what they have to do to get into God's kingdom. Here's the bar, he's telling the people in his kingdom who they are now that they have come to him.

This is their identity. It's the difference between us hearing this and thinking, you know, we really have to do better at being humble and gentle and meek.

I need to be a kinder person this week. Now that's true, but it's not what Jesus is saying. Or I need to really hunger and thirst for what is right.

[12:29] I don't care enough about the big issues in the world and fixing them. Or I need to be purer in heart. I need to put my sins further away. I need to do better at living for Jesus.

That's true, but it's not what he's saying here. What he's saying here is, this is who you are now. This is true of you. This is your identity because you have come to bow to and submit to and follow the king.

Friends, those who are truly blessed are the ones who have come rightly to King Jesus and so have received his kingdom. The first and last blessing shows that really clearly.

See, the same blessing, it brackets the whole thing. There is the kingdom of heaven, top and tail, which is Jesus' way of saying, everything else is contained within that blessing.

It all comes with the kingdom of heaven. So, who receives the kingdom of heaven? What does he say, verse 3? The kingdom of heaven is for those who are poor in spirit.

[13:39] Poor in spirit. What is that? Those who come to him not claiming to have spiritual credit in the bank of heaven, but those who come to him weeping over the unpayable debt that they owe to God.

Not, he says, the spiritual people or the religious people, but the people who know that they cannot even be in God's presence without their sin being dealt with and forgiven and cleared.

Back in chapter 4, verse 17, Matthew tells us, from that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Do you see, the kingdom of heaven is theirs who turn, declare their spiritual bankruptcy, come to the king and enter his kingdom.

Not those who come feeling flush inside, wanting to pay their own way in good works, but those who come to him with empty hands and empty hearts, needing, craving his grace.

And so, Jesus says in verse 10, the kingdom of heaven is for those who are ready to suffer insult and injury because they belong to him. See, not those who follow a party, but follow a person.

[15:07] Not those who work for a cause, but those who serve the king, because he himself is the one who pays the unpayable debt. He himself is the one who is able to forgive our sins and bring us into God's presence.

And so, if we have him, we have God, we have heaven, we have God's rule over us. Without him, without him, we have nothing in heaven.

we have nothing spiritually. We cannot come to God on our own terms. And so, the blessing of the king comes to those who come to him not because of what they think they can give him or as a means to another end, but come to him to have him, to claim the grace that only he can give, the access and entry into his kingdom that only he can grant us.

And the other blessings, they build up a character profile of that very same identity, these same people. The people of Jesus' kingdom, he says, are mourning people who grieve over that debt and grieve because of the sins that we've committed against God and the ongoing sin in our life.

The people of Jesus' kingdom are, he says, meek or gentle or humble people who don't bully and force their way through life but put themselves last as the servant and the slave of all.

[16:44] The people of Jesus' kingdom, he says, are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, not only out there but firstly and foremostly in here that we hunger and thirst for our righteousness not our own and when he has granted it we hunger and thirst to be more like him in righteousness.

The people of Jesus' kingdom are merciful people, he says, because we have been shown more mercy than we could ever conceive of and we have been forgiven more than we could ever understand.

The people of Jesus' kingdom are pure in heart, he says, because our hearts have been cleansed from impurity and washed clean and healed so our love for God is whole and undivided.

The people of Jesus' kingdom are peacemakers, he says, who reach across ethnic and cultural and economic divisions to bring the gospel of peace and who live as one, a people united in the church and in his kingdom from all backgrounds.

The people of Jesus' kingdom, he says, are persecuted because of righteousness, because our righteousness comes from Jesus only and not the places that the people in our world go to look for righteousness.

[18:07] And so, we suffer insult and slander and harm because of him. So, do you see, it is not by trying to be that kind of person that we receive the kingdom of heaven and receive his blessing.

It's by coming to him as our king and savior that we enter his kingdom and become that kind of person through our relationship with him. And that kind of person is a person who is blessed, he says.

So, who is it if you have not come to him with empty hands and declared that you are spiritually bankrupt and asked him to pay the unpayable debt that you owe to God?

Well, that is where you need to begin. Not with trying to be a better person, but by coming to the perfect person and asking for him to be the king over you and your life.

There is no such thing as being half a citizen of a country. You can have dual citizenship, but you can't be half, can you? You either are a citizen of a country or you are not a citizen of a country.

[19 : 23] Well, brothers and sisters, if we have come to King Jesus, we are citizens of heaven. We have received his kingdom and come under his rule. And, yes, we live out our identity to a greater or lesser extent.

We know that. I know that. But, says our king and our God, this is who you are, whether you live up to it or not.

You've come to me. You've entered my kingdom. You're a citizen of heaven. This is your identity. This is it. Because we have come and bowed to King Jesus Christ.

And so, who is it on your poster? What kind of person? If you're a Christian, the person on your poster is you.

It's you. And perhaps that comes as a surprise to you today that you are the one who is truly blessed by God.

[20 : 30] You today have God's favor, acceptance, and approval because you have come to his king in the way that he wants us to come.

So then, how are we blessed? blessed? Our second question, or what are we blessed with that gives us a reason to rejoice and be glad even when we're suffering because of Jesus?

How are we blessed? Now, I said before that God's blessing is his approval. We've got his approval if we are in Christ. But how does he show us his approval?

Well, if the first line in each blessing identifies the kind of person who is blessed, the second line promises the kind of blessing those people receive from God.

See that? And it's worth reiterating all of these blessings are bracketed by the first and last blessings. Theirs is the kingdom of God. So it's not like you could have one without the others or that you could have any of them without God's kingdom or outside of God's kingdom.

[21 : 39] But zooming in, look, it's been pointed out the blessing corresponds to the description in some way. To see that those who mourn will be comforted or blessed are the merciful because they will be shown mercy.

So there's kind of a matching thing going on, isn't there? But there's also development in the blessings too. Inside our two brackets in verses 3 and 10, I think you can see two groups of three. In verses 4, 5, and 6 we have blessings that fill up our emptiness. Our sins grieve us and bring us to the end of ourselves but we will be comforted says Jesus.

So God's blessing to us in coming to him is knowing that we have his favor and approval even when we get it wrong and even when we're crushed by our sins that he has set his love on us that we are forgiven and that gives us confidence and boldness to live for him afresh.

We are weak in the world. Jesus gives us a gentle and a humble way to live that's so different from the way that the world operates. But we will inherit the earth says Jesus.

[23 : 00] If the Beatitudes have become kind of a bit dry and dusty to us, isn't this so life-giving and so fresh, God's blessing is that one day the world that we have been strangers and foreigners in as we've lived for him will one day be our forever home.

Jesus is literally promising the world. We are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, empty, empty in and of ourselves. We come back again and again to Jesus to feed on and to drink in his once-for-all gift of righteousness.

And the blessing is the knowledge that when we come to Jesus we are filled. We are filled and not in the way that you fill up your car when it runs empty and you fill it up and it runs empty and you fill it up but that we are full and when we come to Jesus we feel our fullness.

Whoever comes to me, he says, will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. So those are three ways that our emptiness is filled. We mourn our sin, we are meek in the world, we're starving for righteousness so God's favor and blessing comes to us with deep comfort

and invaluable inheritance and a full and complete righteousness.

And then we have three blessings that kind of overflow from our fullness in Christ. In verses 7, 8, and 9, we are merciful people.

[24 : 32] We love much because we have been forgiven much. And the blessing is that we will be shown mercy. Jesus is so clear in his teaching again that it's not as if we can forgive others enough times to be forgiven by God, but that the mercy we show to others is a response to the mercy that he has shown to us.

And so it is also true, isn't it, if we are unmerciful or unforgiving, probably we haven't ever personally known his mercy and forgiveness because how could we be forgiven so much but loved so little?

And so if we are merciful, it's only because we have been shown mercy, and since we show that genuine fruit of his grace, we will be shown mercy by God on the last day.

We are also pure in heart, our hearts are made new and set apart for God by the Spirit, and the blessing is that we will see God. Again, this blows off the cobwebs, doesn't it?

Have you ever considered that and thought about that? Who is the one who goes up the hill of the Lord and enters into his presence? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

[25 : 57] And our hearts are hardwired to take that as a you must do better, but in coming to Jesus, our hearts have been purified. A pure heart is what you have been given. And so again, like inheriting the earth, the blessing is so great, isn't it, that we will see God.

Sometimes what's called the beatific or the beautiful or blessed vision. It's what David prays for in Psalm 27, one thing I ask from the Lord. Only this do I seek, that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord.

To gaze on the beauty of the Lord. One glorious vision, and that is yours, he says. We are also peacemakers, holding out God's peace to a hostile and divided world, living in peace and unity with his people in the church.

And the blessing is that we will be called the children of God. Because just like him, we take the front foot to bring reconciliation and peace with God to a world that is hostile to him.

We take the front foot to bring peace where there's conflict and hurt and broken relationships in the church. church. And it's only because we're his children that we can, but when we do, says Jesus, when we live out this identity, then we'll be known as his children and called his children.

[27 : 28] So three blessings that fill up our emptiness and three blessings that overflow, not from our inner fullness, but our fullness in Jesus Christ. Now that's a lot to take in.

And I wonder how our posters are coming along. It's a lot, isn't it, to fit on one poster. What Jesus promises is a bit bigger, isn't it, than a Union Square gift card.

Lasting comfort, the world and everything in it, fullness that never runs out, mercy without limit, to be with God himself, to be known as his children.

All this in and with the kingdom of heaven under the loving rule of King Jesus. us. And remember who it is who's holding all these things.

Who is it in the poster? If you are a Christian, it's ye. Ye possess the blessing of God himself.

[28 : 34] The kingdom of heaven is yours. You have his acceptance in his King Jesus, and he blesses you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And so there is in great big bold pink letters the word stamped over your life.

Blessed. Blessed. And there's only one more thing to add to that picture, I think. And that's in verse 12.

What did we say was downstream from God's blessing? real, genuine, lasting, deep happiness.

Rejoice and be glad, he says. Rejoice and be glad. Now, we're not always smiling, are we? And Jesus has said that we are those who mourn.

And there are times of deep sadness and real grief and loss. But I think if our poster is representative of how we feel as people who have been blessed by God in Christ, I think it's right that we add a big, great big smile to that picture.

[29 : 48] If that woman could be so happy about a gift card, how do we feel as we reflect on the immense and undeserved blessings that we receive in Christ? Rejoice and be glad, says our King.

Celebrate, smile, be happy, because great is your reward in heaven. Rejoice and be glad, not only on the easy days, but on the days when holding on to Jesus is costing you everything that you have, your reputation, your income, your home, your friends.

For in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you. God's blessing clearly, clearly doesn't make life easy. Clearly doesn't give us everything that we want. But you have something that even the prophets didn't have. Because the kingdom of heaven has come near. In the person of the king himself, his birth, his life, his ministry, his death and resurrection.

So brothers and sisters, blessing, it means a lot more than being happy. But Jesus reminds us that it doesn't mean anything less, does it? Rejoice and be glad, because coming to King Jesus and entering his kingdom, you are truly blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, in and through God's king, Jesus Christ.

[31 : 14] Let's praise him as we pray together. Let's rejoice and be glad. Amen. Our Father, we come to you as those who are poor in spirit, and we praise you that you've taken thought for us in Jesus.

We thank you, our Father, though we are so undeserving. And though, Lord, there was no need for you to show grace, mercy, and love to us, that you've done so through your Son.

We thank you for him and for his kingdom. We thank you for his rule and reign over us. And our Father, how we pray that we would learn to own and to live into our identity.

Lord, that we would know that every day we are truly blessed by you because we have your acceptance in Christ. Lord, we know that we struggle with this in our hearts, and we default, Lord, to trying to earn your favor.

But how we pray that in Jesus you would assure us of your favor to towards us, and that you would help us to live as those who are blessed in your world.

[32 : 27] For this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.