

## The Beatitudes Matthew's Gospel 5:1-20

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

I remember taking the wedding of a young couple many years ago and after the service getting into conversation with a retired Church of England vicar. We had a really encouraging conversation about our shared Christian faith and when we finished speaking, he said to me, "Bless you." It was not the first time someone had said those words to me, but I have never forgotten the genuine, warm-hearted desire for my spiritual blessing conveyed in those two simply words.

Today, we will look at what are described as "The Beatitudes" in Matthew 5. There are eight beatitudes which all begin with the word "Blessed." "Blessed" means to speak well of, and the Lord uses it to describe the character of those He blesses and the nature of their blessing. You cannot come away from these blessings without understanding how much Jesus Christ wants us to know His blessing in our lives.

### 1. The poor in spirit

Jesus begins with the words,

"Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"  
(Matthew 5:3).

These are the first words Jesus spoke to His disciples as He sat down on the mountainside in Matthew 5. What follows has become known as the Sermon on the Mount. When the Lord speaks about the poor in spirit, He is not describing those who are materially poor. The most helpful insight into His meaning is what we find in Isaiah 57:15,

"For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.""

The poor in spirit are those who recognise their need and look outside of themselves for salvation. When we come to Christ, this is the experience we have. It is an overwhelming sense of our spiritual poverty and need for a Saviour. Peter had this experience in Luke 5:1-11. In this chapter, the Lord had taught a large crowd of people from the disciples' boat. Afterwards, He told them to launch into the deep and fish. Peter explained to the Lord that they had fished all night and caught nothing. He knew the Lake of Gennesaret well, and felt he was wasting his time launching the boat a second time. Peter did not understand that the Person who spoke to him was the One who made the lake and everything in it. Peter did what the Lord asked out of politeness but thinking he knew better. The fishermen were overwhelmed by the catch of fish they had because they obeyed the Lord. It left a profound impression on Peter's heart. He knew He was not worthy to be in the presence of the Lord. He felt poor in spirit and humbled himself as he discovered what was in his

own heart. It was not the last time this would happen. He was in the presence of the One who inhabits eternity and whose name is Holy. Peter felt his unholiness. The Lord's greatness brought Peter into the place of contrition and humility and the entrance to blessing.

Isaiah also wrote, "To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones." The Lord's following words to Peter were, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men" (verse 10). The Saviour takes a headstrong fisherman and begins to transform Him into a lowly shepherd. Peter later powerfully and beautifully encourages us to, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5: 6-7). The great lesson Peter teaches us is that the humility we learned at the cross should always characterise us as the children of God. Our strength and power are only found in the Saviour. Now, like those fishermen so long ago, it is our business to forsake all, follow the Saviour, and prove the blessedness of the life we have in Him.

## 2. The Mourners

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"  
(Matthew 5:4).

The Lord Jesus uses the word mourn to describe those who feel the effects and consequences of living in a suffering world. We mourn when we lose someone we love. And we also mourn over other painful experiences, regrets and mistakes. It is not something we only feel in our own circumstances but also in those of others. Travelling through the world desensitised to its suffering and distress is possible. But this attitude should never characterise Christians. The Lord never walked through the world in this way. He was "A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3) who constantly felt our needs in His heart.

Mourning is a genuine experience that causes us to pause, reflect and learn. In Psalm 69:20, we read of Christ,

"Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."

But we discover He is the source of comfort. The Holy Spirit is also called the Comforter (John 14:16 AV). In Acts 9:31, we read,

"The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied."

Romans teaches us about the comfort of the Scriptures, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). We are also comforted through the ministry of God's word (1 Corinthians 14:3).

God is the God of all comfort, and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, He ministers to us in circumstances which cause us to mourn. In addressing our distress, we are not only comforted and strengthened to carry on, but He wants us to become comforters,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Mourning is not a fruitless experience. Through it, we face the sorrows and pain of life, and, as 2 Corinthians 1 explains, it has a refining effect on us. Knowing the God of comfort's presence and power can transform us into those who can comfort and support others in their sufferings.

The Lord Jesus describes His ministry in Luke 4:18-19 by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2a. This passage in Isaiah continues,

“To comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (verses 2b-3).

Mourning is not a destination. It is a part of a journey that leads to the day when,

“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4, AV).

### **3. The Meek**

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

Jesus Christ was characterised by lowliness. He says of Himself, “I am gentle [meek, AV]” Matthew 11: 29. In Matthew 21, when the Lord Jesus enters Jerusalem as its rightful King, it was in fulfilment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9,

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

His righteousness and power to save were demonstrated in meekness.

Meekness is an outward expression of inward power. It is the joyful acceptance of the mind and will of God for our lives and demonstrates an implicit trust in His blessing in all circumstances. Meekness is living in the reality and power of Romans 8:28,

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

We tend to mistake meekness with timidity. The original sense of a gentleman was a man of rank possessing a gentle, generous, and courageous character. Today, the world often confuses loudness and self-assertion with power. Micah describes what God requires, “To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Proverbs 31:10-31 describes the characteristics of godly women and lists the attributes which emerge from walking in the fear of the Lord (verse 30). These are not the actions of timid people but of active and fruitful lives.

Paul writes in Philippians 2,

“God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (verses 9-11).

The Lord expressed His kingship through meekness as He entered Jerusalem. In a future day, the same Jesus will be owned as King of kings and Lord of lords. Today, from the glory of His majesty

in heaven, He invites us to learn to become like Him in meekness and humility. He empowers us to live useful lives for Him. The Lord spoke to His disciples about the meek inheriting the earth. This will be seen perfectly in the Person of Christ in the coming day. And our inheritance is in Him.

“Walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and long-suffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Colossians 1:10-12).

Seeing Christ’s majesty reveals the power of His meekness in us.

#### 4. The Hungry

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

The Father declared Jesus as “[His] beloved Son, in whom [He] was well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Following the joy of that moment and before entering His ministry of grace, Jesus goes into the wilderness. He is led there by the Holy Spirit and fasts (Matthew 4). In the Old Testament, the people of God set everyday life aside in times of crisis and fasted and prayed to confess their failure and cast themselves upon God. The Lord Jesus goes into the wilderness in all the perfection of His Sonship. He demonstrates through fasting His devotion to the Father and fulfilling His will, “not living by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (verse 4). All the beatitudes are seen perfectly in the Saviour. His hunger and thirst were to do the will of God. All our blessings come from His power to do this,

“Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:9).

The Lord’s ministry addressed unrighteousness. He constantly highlighted and judged the hypocrisy, legalism, and manifest failure of those responsible for the spiritual well-being of God’s people. At the same time, He dedicated Himself to addressing the needs which surrounded Him in grace and with humility. At Sychar’s well, wearied, hungry and thirsty, He leads one lost soul to Himself (John 4). Afterwards, His disciples encourage Him to eat. He replies,

“I have food to eat of which you do not know” (John 4:32) adding, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

On the Cross, the Lord Jesus in all the exhaustion of His sufferings says, “I thirst.” His following words were not words of exhaustion but of power, “It is finished” (John 19:28,30).

Before His resurrection, the Lord’s disciples did not understand His total devotion to His Father’s will. Nor in that devotion did they see the manifestation of the Father’s heart. Philip even asked Jesus to show the disciples the Father. There is a sadness in the Lord’s reply,

“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).  
“[He is] the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3).

In Christ, we discover, “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17), all attributes of the fruit of the Spirit of God. The Lord has made us righteous. He set us free from sin to become “the slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:19). We follow the Lord in pursuing righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11 and 2 Timothy 2:22)

and being guided in it by the word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). In 2 Timothy 4:8, we are promised a crown of righteousness. Our Saviour is the “King of righteousness” and the “King of peace” (Hebrews 7:2). The Bible promises He will reign in righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5). And in the eternal day righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13). In the meantime, may His love cause us to hunger and thirst for righteousness as we seek to be “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11).

## 5. The Merciful

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

Mercy is a practical response to another’s need. The cost is borne by someone showing mercy. The mercy of God has its source in His love,

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

This relationship with love is significant. A lawyer tested the Lord with the question, “Which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36). Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). I think Jesus quoted the second commandment to challenge the questioner’s heart. Our behaviour towards others is a measure of our love for God. The lawyer was simply asking an academic question. The Lord was describing His life.

The Lord’s ministry was characterised by mercy. It was shown to the broken-hearted, blind, deaf, mute, crippled, lame, diseased, frightened and hopeless, and it even conquered death. It was established in love and grace. But the time came, in the words of Psalm 69:20, when the Lord Jesus experienced reproach which broke His heart, and He could say,

“I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.”

The Person whose mercy ensured our salvation was never relieved in the suffering it cost. Now, in resurrection glory, His ministry of mercy continues. He is our merciful and faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17), able to come to our aid in time of need with a heart which understands our sufferings and can relieve them,

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Overwhelmingly in the New Testament, mercy is something which we receive from God in abundance. But in receiving such rich mercy, it compels us to show it. We should be merciful. Romans reminds us to show mercy with cheerfulness (Romans 12:8). James writes that wisdom from above is full of mercy (James 3:17). We are encouraged to show mercy eagerly, cheerfully and plentifully.

In Luke 10:36, after telling the story of the Good Samaritan, the Lord asked the lawyer which person was neighbour to the man who fell among the thieves? The Lawyer said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise” (v.37). The Lord wasn’t just challenging the lawyer. He was speaking to me.

## 6. The Pure in heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

The word “pure” here means cleansed. Only those redeemed by God and made holy through Christ’s work see God. Now we see by faith. The Christian’s hope in Christ will take us into the presence of God. We are introduced to both these thoughts at the beginning of John 14,

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (vv.1-3).

The Lord makes Himself the object of our faith, “Believe also in Me.” This is our present experience. We live by faith, as Paul describes in Galatians 2:20,

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

When the Passover lamb was chosen, it was kept demonstrating its perfection before its sacrifice (Exodus 12:5-6). Christ’s purity, holiness, and perfection were seen in His peerless life. And that life was given for us in love at Calvary. Now, in resurrection glory, He is the object of our faith. His love sustains us, and we witness to it in our lives.

In John 14:2, the Lord also promises to take His people into the Father’s house. In John 17:24, Jesus prays to the Father that His Church “may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.” Ephesians 5 explains that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her, and one day will present her to Himself as a glorious Church. Finally, 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, we have described to us the day the redeemed company are brought into the Father’s house. On that day, we shall enter into the completeness of our salvation and our eternal destiny.

In the opening verses of 1 John chapter 3, the apostle beautifully describes God’s love for us. He has made us His children and promised that we will be with Christ and like Him, “for we shall see Him as He is” (v.2) Then he adds, “And everyone who has this hope in Him [Christ] purifies himself, just as He is pure” (v.3). The reality of Christ’s return profoundly affected the early Church. It shaped and enriched their lives. It purified them and enabled them to live not in self-righteousness but lives of sacrifice, purpose and witness. The pure in heart do not love the world, but they do live in the world. The word of God sanctifies us, and we are sent into the world by the Lord to be His witnesses (John 17:14-18). Christ’s purifying ministry begins in our hearts. It purifies our lives and transforms us into His likeness. The world dismisses purity and suffers the consequences of impurity. We are to be characterised by purity and its blessings.

## 7. The Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Isaiah describes Immanuel as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied of the coming Christ who would “guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79). The Lord’s birth was heralded by angels saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14).

The Lord dispensed peace wherever He went. In Mark chapters 4 and 5, we see this ministry so clearly. The wind is rebuked, and He spoke to the sea, “Peace be still”; Nature is at peace (Mark

4:39). Legion is set free from the power of Satan and is found sitting, clothed, and in his right mind; a man was at peace (Mark 5:15). The diseased woman who could not be cured was healed, and the Lord said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace"; a woman was at peace (Mark 5:34). And Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead, "Little girl, I say to you, arise"; a family was at peace (Mark 5:41). The Saviour intervenes in our circumstances and in our lives to bring peace.

The Lord Jesus gave His peace to His disciples (John 14:27) before going to the cross. Upon the cross, He imparts peace to the heart of the dying thief, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). In the resurrection, He appears to His disciples with the words, "Peace to you" (John 20:26). We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). We can know the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, and we can know the God of peace (Philippians 4:7,9).

Given this incredible manifestation of God's peace in Christ, why would "the peace of God" not rule in our hearts?" (Colossians 3:15). Why would we not be "at peace among ourselves?" (1 Thessalonians 5:13). Why would we not "pursue righteousness faith, love, and peace?" (2 Timothy 2:22). Why would we not be "peaceful, gentle, showing humility to all men?" (Titus 3:2). Why would we not be "peacemakers" and never be known as "troublemakers?"

I recall the story of a Christian who decided to get fit and joined the gym at a boxing club. The boxing trainer at the gym had a fierce temper. One day the trainer completely lost his temper and flew into a fit of rage. The Christian went across to him, put a hand on his shoulder, and simply said, "You need the peace of God in your heart." Not long after, the man found "peace with God." The Great Peacemaker has made us the children of God. Let us walk through this new day grounded in the Gospel of peace, witnessing to it and ready to be peacemakers.

## 8. The Persecuted

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

Persecution means subjecting people to ill-treatment often with their complete destruction in view. In the book of Acts, we see that persecution begins once the Church is born and flourishes. The Lord Jesus told His disciples,

"If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20).

The religious authorities persecuted the apostles Peter and John and then Stephen. The death of Stephen led to the great persecution in Acts 8:1. It was systematic, organised and led by a zealous Pharisee called Saul. He recalls in Acts 22:4,

"I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."

In Acts 12, the state, under Herod, also persecuted the Church, killing James and arresting Peter. Throughout the history of the Church of Christ, it has suffered persecution at the hands of religious and political powers. It is a history that continues to this day. May we always remember so many of our brethren who are, hated, pursued, imprisoned, tortured and killed in many parts of the world. They should always be in our hearts and prayers, and their faith should encourage us.

Persecution is founded on unrighteousness. The Saviour was hounded by the Pharisees, Levites and lawyers, for doing good, with a thirst that was only satisfied by His death. But His sufferings revealed the heart of God in all its abundance of love and grace. The apostles' persecution demonstrated their utter faith and joy in God. Persecution scattered the Christians beyond Jerusalem and began an explosion of evangelism, prophesied by the Lord Jesus in Acts 1:8, which still burns brightly today. Persecution led Saul, the persecutor, to the feet of Jesus (Acts 9:1-6) and caused the hard-hearted Philippian jailer to ask Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Persecution presents Christ in the sufferings of His people. It is the most powerful witness to His love and grace.

The Kingdom of Heaven emphasises the earthy aspect of the Kingdom of God. In the promised millennial kingdom, righteousness will reign. The injustice which characterises our world will be put to right by the King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ's kingdom will belong to the lowly, mourners, the meek, those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who were persecuted for righteousness' sake. Those who were hated in the world, driven from it, and "of whom the world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:38), "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10)

As Christians, we are already in the Kingdom of God spiritually. We recognise and live in the light of Christ's rule and authority in our hearts and fellowship. The kingdom also has in view rewards for our faithfulness to the Lord. Currently, the King is rejected but returning. In the meantime, it is for us to manifest the gracious features the Lord Jesus spoken of in the beatitudes. He was the perfect expression of holy lowliness, sorrow, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, peace and suffering. It is our calling to follow Him and express these beautiful features of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such fruitfulness glorifies the Father (John 15:8).

### **Salt and Light**

Jesus follows [The Beatitudes with the words,](#)

["You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"" \(vv.13-16\).](#)

The Lord describes us as the "salt of the earth." Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. The English word salary comes from French and Latin roots. "Sal" is the Latin word for salt. It was a valuable resource as a flavour, preservative, and an antiseptic. As disciples of Christ, our lives should have the flavour of Christlikeness, preserving ourselves and others from corrupting influences, and presenting the healing power of the Gospel. At the same time, we are to "shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life" (Philippians 2:15-16).

In this endeavour, Christ is our example (vv.17-20). He alone fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. His love, grace, and mercy redeemed us and made us righteous in the sight of God. So now we are a people who live to "approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:10-11).

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on 'The Beatitudes', Matthew 5:1-20  
Talk number, T1168.

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