



Speaker:
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Gospel Promises of Beatitudes

4/19/2020 (SUN) | Bible: **Matthew 5:1-12**

Today, I want us to look more closely at the opening verses of Matthew 5. We heard how Jesus had been all over Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. And to a people fixated with signs, Jesus accompanied the gospel preaching with miraculous healings.

People who were paralysed got up and walked after Jesus gave the command. And those who were possessed by demons, which caused all kinds of physical problems, had the demons flee in terror at the presence of God the Son.

At some point after this, we find Jesus the Master, addressing his disciples, in the most famous sermon in history. We call it “The Sermon on the Mount”. There’s another account in Luke’s gospel, in which Christ’s message is very similar. I don’t know whether they are the same sermon relayed in different ways, or different addresses but with Jesus going over many of the same teachings in each. Both are possible; both make sense; and it’s not necessary for us to agree on one or the other right now.

If the Sermon on the Mount is the most famous in history, then the first part of it is possibly the most famous out of the whole sermon. We know this as “The Beatitudes”. Beatitude means “happiness”—in this case *promises of happiness*. Each verse begins with “blessed are...”, and he goes on to list apparently different groups of people who are blessed, or who shall be blessed.

Well I hope today to expose the world’s understanding of these verses as false, and present them to you as **words of love from a bridegroom to his bride, the church**. I want to impress on you that these pronouncements do not refer to different groups of people in the world, but rather **they all refer to one group of people: God’s elect**.

Why do I say the world has misunderstood the meaning of this passage? Well that’s what I want to do for each of these phrases: tell you what it doesn’t mean, then what it *does* mean. Because it’s wrong, having the words of the Son of God which are intended for his children falsely applied to the children of darkness.

Our saviour’s audience here was made up of professing believers. He calls them “the salt of the earth”, “the light of the world” and children of the father in heaven.

So let’s look at the very first saying:

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

“The poor in spirit”. The world would undoubtedly think it better if Jesus had meant poor in material terms. That sounds better, as if Christ was saying, “Don’t worry if you have no money. Cheer up, I’ll make you feel happy.” A sort of consolation, so they wouldn’t feel miserable in their poverty.

How the world wants these blessings for themselves! And many who profess to know Christ encourage this. They want to be a friend of God and a friend of the world. Therefore everything they intend to say to the world is framed so that it pleases the hearers. This is why they preach a social gospel, one which exalts man’s works—one which is another gospel, not the power of God unto salvation. And they try to reassure poor people that Jesus loves them, and wants to help them, thereby giving people false assurance.

No: this has nothing to do with lack of money. Poor *in spirit*. These are they who experience **spiritual poverty**. That is, they feel their **unworthiness** before God. These are they who have had their eyes opened by God, so they get a glimpse of his holiness and their sinfulness.

And this is not the experience only of those who God is converting, but of the converted also. The believer may, like Paul, feel joy and much assurance. Yet the one who was the chief of the apostles saw himself as the chief of sinners. Are you one of Christ’s? Do you feel what Paul felt, that holy mixture of joy and sorrow? Then to you comes Christ’s promise, right here: **the kingdom of heaven is yours!**

Whether the Bible speaks of the kingdom as being within you, or around you, or present, or future...it’s one kingdom, *and if you’re in, you’re in! For all eternity!*

Let’s press on to the next one, in verse 4:

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

“They that mourn”. We associate mourning with death. We mourn when someone we care about dies. And no doubt the world likes to think that Jesus is looking down on them at times like that, and I’m sure their sad delusion even gives them comfort. But it’s all in their imagination.

A few years ago, I went to the funeral of a family member—no-one so close that it upset me too much. It was, as all my family’s funerals are, in an Anglican church. The vicar was a woman. And she spoke about this deceased woman—who of course she’d never met. And what a eulogy! What a great woman this was, we were told. And the family loved it, because there was no reference to sin, righteousness or judgement. The family was promised that the old girl was now in heaven with Jesus! Yes: this foul-mouthed, blaspheming hater of God was now in his presence forever! And, more than that: we were assured by this priestess that we were all going to join her one day! How I kept my tongue that day, I don’t know. It was only the wise counsel of an older brother in Christ that kept me from marching back down there that evening and telling her what a deceiver she was.

Who’s the family going to believe? An ordained, academically qualified vicar in the Church of England, or some wet-behind-the-ears lad in the family who says strange things about being “saved” and “born again”? I’m sure you can guess.

So the world, and its false apostles, would like to claim this verse too, to talk about how God will be there for anyone who mourns over the death of someone they love. But, again, the world is wrong. This has nothing to do with death. This pronouncement by our Saviour **speaks of those who mourn over sin**. Those who mourn particularly over their *own* sin. This mourning can be just as bitter as when we mourn about a death. It is speaking particularly about those who mourn because God is beginning to deal with them in order to usher them into his sheepfold.

Remember the prophet Isaiah when he had a vision of God on his throne? He cried, "Woe is me! For I am undone!". And this was just a vision! You ever been there? Ever feel like crying, because of your indwelling sin? Yes? Join the club. No? Then you need to take a hard look at your profession. Our experiences of these things; the depth of feeling we have does vary, greatly. I accept that. But if you have no experience of mourning over your sin, you cannot be a child of God. Maybe you stuck your hand up and got baptised as a teenager, I dunno. But examine yourself, rigorously, to see whether you are in the faith.

There are other reasons for mourning, apart from our own sinfulness. There is the sin of the world. We mourn that there is such wickedness around us; and we sometimes forget that God is in control, and panic about the way the world is going.

And there is mourning over sins amongst professed believers around the world. The second letter of Peter says that, because of the behaviour of some who call themselves "Christians", the way of truth will be mocked.

Then there are the believers who you know—you mourn because of their sin too. (By the way, you could try to talk to them about it...but be prepared for a backlash. Most don't like to think they've been doing things wrong. And always remember this: when you point the finger at someone, [show] there's three more pointing back at you.) Beware, though: concentrating mostly on the sins of others is **poison**. It creates a self-righteous attitude, kills grace, and means you cannot esteem others better than yourself.

But you who know all too well what it is to mourn over your sin, who look forward to that future state when your sinful flesh will become dust; you have Christ's promise, that you will be comforted. Our kind Saviour will draw near to you and say, "Forgiven". The very name of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—is "the comforter, the one who comes alongside you". The word of God gives you tremendous comfort in its gospel promises. And when we break bread together, we can look with the eye of faith, to the prints of the nails in the Lamb's hands and feet, and take comfort from his words, "It is finished". Every sin paid in full.

Have a look now at verse five:

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

Who are the meek? Maybe it means those people in the world who are quiet, and smile all the time. Well, I know a few nuns who fit that description. And one TV commentator said how "meek" the pope looked, as if this showed how close he was to God!

Of course, this verse is meant for those who are of the elect of God. As we've seen, being a quiet person in itself doesn't mean anything. Meek-looking nuns have tortured other

nuns, and popes who look meek for most of the time have ordered the slaughter of millions of the Lord's people down the centuries. Most serial killers are the "quiet type"!

True meekness, then, is that which is only found in one who the Lord is dealing with in mercy. It is a humility which can only come from those who know something of the reality of their sin, **and their utter reliance on God.** It is an absence of pride, which the world cannot have, because they still believe there is something in them deserving of reward with God.

He who exalts himself shall be abased, or "humbled", Matthew says later on; but he who abases himself shall be exalted. Be of a quiet spirit. Be slow to anger. Repay evil with kindness.

So what is the promise held out to the one called of God out of this world? The earth itself. We may be strangers in this earth now, but a new paradise earth is promised, where the saints will walk in new, incorruptible resurrection bodies.

It's possible that Jesus instead meant that it is only the saved who are the rightful owners of the present earth. Or perhaps it was an allusion to the ancient promise to the Hebrews that they would inherit all the land of Canaan. That would certainly strike a chord with this audience. One thing is sure: the eternal future for God's church surpasses anything you or I can imagine.

Verse six, the fourth of Christ's promises, goes:

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

The only righteousness the world cares for is their own. The carnal mind cannot tolerate the thought that they are bad people. Just ask them! Go into the local pubs or go on the internet and just ask people: "Are you a bad person?". Christian, you'll be amazed at how few sinners there are in this world!

Is it the whole world who is addressed with this blessing? If the people in this world have their own righteousness—their own inherent "goodness"—then why would they hunger and thirst after more? Some might decide they want more of this thing, they want to be more "holy". So they start going to church, and they'll start rebuking others for their ungodly behaviour. They'll often stop drinking and smoking, which makes them REALLY spiritual(!) **Utter religious hypocrisy.**

You know, I'd rather some Christians would take up smoking than do some of the things they do!

The righteousness spoken of here, then, is something altogether different. It's not the filthy rags of righteousness which men create themselves. It is the righteousness of another, one whose character and behaviour shows his righteousness to be perfect. **IT IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD'S DARLING SON, JESUS CHRIST.**

When God gave men his laws at Sinai, it was the purpose of these that it would expose men's sin. Not one man has ever kept God's laws, even for one minute—until the incarnate Son of God came, that is. He kept every aspect of the law—all the time. In doing this, while in the likeness of human flesh, he proved his divine nature.

All men need Christ's righteousness, but not all want it. Only those who were predestined unto salvation had their sins remitted at Calvary; **and only those who were redeemed at Calvary will have this hunger for Christ's righteousness.** That's the way it is.

God, in his absolute control of this universe, has ordered all events in history to bring his chosen ones into existence. And at some point in their life on this earth, he comes and touches them with saving power, and converts them. Every one is given a sense of their need. They come to realise that they're in a state of spiritual **starvation**...and they hunger and thirst after Christ's perfect righteousness.

Remember, now: most people aren't hungry or thirsty in that way. Most people are on the broad road which leads to destruction, and few are on that road which leads to eternal life; and that's way it's always been. Why do think all those thousands of people ignore the open-air preachers in town? Why do you think there's so little response from people in the streets around the church? Because there's no hunger for Christ.

We are commanded to take the gospel out to everyone. But when we spread the good news, is it good news to everyone? Of course not. For some, the apostle Paul says, it's like a stench of death in their nostrils. But to others, it's what they've been waiting for. *To them* it's good news.

These are the ones who have known a desire to partake of Jesus' blood and righteousness, and to them he says, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

Here then is Jesus' promise: that those in whom God instils a hunger for his Son shall be filled. Not partial righteousness, to be perfected in glory; but **present and perfect righteousness**, for you believers are accepted in the beloved.

What of this one:

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

"The merciful". Who are they? I'm sure you'll know by now that it's not going to be anything to do with some High Court judge showing mercy to an accused man and gaining merit with God. The world can, sometimes, show mercy.

But knowing that this address is about the Lord's people, how does it differ? It doesn't mean even that God will save people who show mercy to others. This is about those who have been converted.

1. We've looked at those who are made to see their spiritual poverty
2. We've seen how they mourn at their state
3. They come in meekness of spirit
4. Hungry and thirsty, they are filled by the righteousness of Christ

And now the convert is a new creation. He sees things as they are, from God's viewpoint. He is transformed in a way that he does things like Christ. He shows mercy to others, but these works are done in Christ's name. He shows mercy where the worldling would not, to

those who hate him. He loves those who revile him. He understands that, were it not for God's mercy and grace, he would be in the place of the sinner he's trying to help.

Mercy has always been a highly regarded virtue in the scriptures. The Lord said through Hosea, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice". In other words, "I'd rather you showed mercy than offered sacrifices". James says that, if you don't show mercy to others, God will show no mercy to you at the judgement.

Do you believers understand mercy? Are you compassionate towards others? Not the people you like, but the people you don't like—the people you hate. "But brother, I don't hate anyone". What about so-and-so? "Oh, them. Well, we don't get on, but I wouldn't wish them any harm." No. That's not love. The world can do better than that!

If mercy is not retaliating, not treating them like they've treated you, but showing love to those people, then that's what God wants from you. Love, or mercy, might be a feeling, but it's proven by doing things for others, as we've seen very powerfully in John's letters.

The one who shows mercy will receive mercy. But this isn't just about the judgement. We receive mercy in conversion, we receive mercy at the end...but we also receive mercy **now**: we receive it when we approach his throne in prayer; we receive it in the material things he provides daily, and in the strength he gives us when tempted. HE IS ALL MERCY. The Psalms say that "his mercy endureth forever", and "is great, above the heavens".

The world, you know, shows compassion simply from a tenderness of nature. We, however, do it out of love, not just for our fellow man, but for God. It is our duty, above everything else; and we find, in Christ, mercy the world knows nothing of.

Verse eight then:

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

The "pure in heart". Do we find *them* in the world? Well maybe we see those who think themselves to be pure. We do hear of those who have a "heart of gold". But, when you assess them by God's standards, their heart is far from pure.

What does God see when he looks down on the sons of men? "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Psalms 14:2,3)

So he didn't see any who were "pure I heart" then! So who are they? 2 Timothy 2:22 says: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord...out of a pure heart."

The only people on this planet who are pure in heart are those who have had a heart transplant performed by God. He takes their stony, rebellious heart, and gives them a new one.

Not only are the saints the only ones with pure hearts, but their hearts are perfect. Truly, while we are in these bodies of death, we feel the pull of temptation. We think of ourselves

as carnal, because we know what's right, but don't do it. And we know what's wrong, but that's the very thing we go and do.

Yet there is within us a new nature, one born of above, one that is perfectly holy, sanctified, and blameless. A new man or new woman who is washed in Jesus' blood and clothed in a robe of his righteousness.

Hearer, are you not in God's kingdom today? Then your heart is in the same corrupt state as when you were conceived. Deceitful. Desperately wicked. And do you know the sad thing? You can never change it—try as you might. Make all the resolutions you want. Turn over a new leaf. Do charity work. **COMMIT YOURSELF TO THE CHURCH...NONE OF THIS, OR ANYTHING ELSE, WILL GIVE YOU A NEW HEART.** Only God can give you a new heart. And he does it to whoever he will.

To you I'll say just one thing: **repent, and believe the gospel.** If God, by his grace, gives you the gift of faith, then you will join the body of Christ, the church of God, and you'll partake in the things I've been speaking of. **And you'll see God.**

I don't just mean in the world to come, but now. We see him now. Not with our physical eyes, for he is a spirit. Not in a vision either. But we see him **with the eyes of faith.** It says in Hebrews (2: 8,9): "But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death."

We see God the Son with the mind's eye. And we love him. If you've never experienced love for Christ, you might wonder how you can love someone you've never seen! We meet him in the Bible, we meet him in the preaching of the gospel, and we enjoy a meal with him each Lord's Day around his table! I can't explain it, really—just tell you what a joy it is!

Let's press on now to verse nine:

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

"The peacemakers". Here's one the world loves. Fancy Jesus himself blessing the work of all the peacemakers around the world! All those United Nations employees and soldiers; all those diplomats, even those in the false ecumenical movement, all commended by Christ Jesus!

The worst example I've seen of this was in the Queen's speech one year. She talked of the UN peacekeepers in some warzone or other; and, do you know, she quoted this verse from the Bible! Can you believe it!

No, the people she referred to have nothing to do with this scripture. But neither do I mean that man can in any way make peace between himself and God, for that is God's work. I'm sure it *does* refer in a general way to the way Christians make peace between men. It's right that we promote peace. When we answer angry people in a meek way, we turn away their wrath. We should seek to live peaceably with all men, wherever possible. And we should do so even more to our brethren, those in the household of faith.

But, primarily, **the peacemakers are those who proclaim the *gospel of peace.*** By spreading the gospel, they are being used by God to point people to the way of

repentance. And the result of this work is that peace is made between men and God, through the work of the mediator, Jesus Christ.

The good tidings we spread is called in Romans, “the gospel of peace”, and blessings are promised to those who publish, or proclaim, it. To these is the promise made, that they shall be called, “**The children of God**”. Imagine that. A child of God.

The world, of course, is convinced that we’re all God’s children. And when the false prophets in the churches deceive people the way they do, it’s no wonder they think this way. After all, if you’re told by some religious guy in a dog collar that God loves everyone, and Christ died for everyone, of course people will believe we’re all God’s children!

Why do think when thugs and gangsters die, we get these little poems in the newspaper columns saying, “Don’t worry now, lad; you’re with Jesus and grandad now, all watching the football together.” Most people have had such a sickly, sentimental picture of our God painted for them by certain preachers, that they reason that a God who loves them so much couldn’t possibly consign them to eternal damnation.

Sadly, they are all children of wrath—children of the devil. But we who have been born again by the Spirit of God, are truly CHILDREN OF GOD! In Romans chapter 8:16,17, it says: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”

The man, woman or child who has been made a new creature in Christ, is a child of God, and they are the only ones who can aptly call him “heavenly father”. And to these alone belongs all the inheritance God has prepared for them.

Finally, we come to the last of our promises. Verses ten and eleven are similar, so I’m going to treat them in one go:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (Matthew 5:10-11)

Persecution. Reviling. Slander. These things are common in the world. Everyone has been the subject of hate from time to time. Sinful human nature makes sure of that.

But I’m sure you get the picture by now: this does not apply to just anyone, simply because they’ve suffered. The world has its own heroes: Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King must be in the world’s “top ten”. Both of these men have suffered. Rightly or wrongly, both were persecuted because of what they believed in.

But our text says, “persecuted *for righteousness sake*”. All kinds of people have suffered persecution: Jews and Arabs, blacks and whites, atheists and religious people. But if they are not **the righteous**...if they are not disciples of Christ, then these blessings are not for them.

Even those who belong to religious cults and false religion, but who call themselves “Christian” are not meant. Russelites, or “Jehovah’s Witnesses”, as they falsely call themselves; Mormons; Roman Catholics; members of the Eastern Orthodox Church; these all have been maligned and persecuted at some point by people who believed they were

Christians, and very few if any were so. Only those who have the righteousness of Christ are meant. The blessing is for them alone.

I wouldn't wish suffering of any kind on a brother Christian, but the fact is that if you spend your life doing God's work, you will be reviled, and you will be persecuted to some degree. When I speak to some older Christians, and they have no knowledge of these things, I have to wonder: *What have you been doing all your life?* Without doubt, some professing Christians have spent their whole lives just going to church each week. Does that describe you? Then it's time to ask yourself some hard questions.

Opposition from the world is inevitable. And it's usually in proportion to how hard you work. The more you tell the world about Jesus Christ and him crucified, the more abuse you'll experience. But don't faint with fear. Take heart. Do things, accept the flak, and receive a blessing from your redeemer.

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In these promises, we've looked at people who God is working with at every stage, from the first feelings of despair over sin, through the gift of righteousness and finishing with those things which are the mark of one who is going on with God.

For each stage, blessings are handed out freely by the redeemer. And the last blessing in this passage is the promise of a future reward, prepared by Christ for all those who love God. Blessings which are beyond our imagination.

Amen.