

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5

Introduction

One of the most well known passages of the Bible is that section in Matthew chapters 5 to 7 that is called the Sermon on the Mount. These chapters contain some of the most penetrating teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ gave during his earthly ministry. But something that often happens is that people ignore the opening verses of the sermon and go on to more familiar parts, such as the Lord's prayer or the parable of the wise and foolish builders. However, unless we have begun to understand the opening verses in Matthew 5 we shall find it impossible to understand fully the rest of the sermon. Indeed, those who do overlook these verses make a very serious mistake, because it is here that Jesus shows us the character of the true Christian believer.

As always with the 'Sound Words' study booklets you will gain the most help from them if you have your Bible by your side so that you can follow all the passages to which we refer. Prayerfully seek the help of the Holy Spirit to teach you the truths that Jesus brings out in these verses and ask him to write them on your heart and produce their fruit in your life.

During the series of 'Sound Words' programmes that are the basis of this study booklet, I received the help of Pastor Nigel Lacey for which I am very grateful. Nigel recorded those programmes while preparing to leave England to serve the Lord in Kenya.

May God give you a deeper understanding of this part of the Bible as you read these pages.

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Chapter 1 Introduction to the Beatitudes

The 'Beatitudes' of Jesus are the group of Bible verses that begin with the word "*Blessed*", and which we find in Matthew 5:3-12. Before we consider them in detail we need to say a number of things by way of introduction to help our understanding of these important verses.

1) They are for all Christian believers

The first thing we need to note is that these verses are specifically addressed to the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Matthew 5:1-2) "*His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying...*" In other words, the 'Beatitudes' are for Christian believers, the followers of the Lord Jesus. This is important to stress because some have taught that these verses do not apply to Christians at all, but Matthew tells very clearly that they were addressed to the true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, therefore, presents us with a great challenge. No Christian believer can avoid this Bible passage or say, "This does not apply to me!" (NB. All of the teaching in these verses is also found in the other books of the New Testament, which gives further weight to the fact that they apply to Christian believers.) The Bible teaches that the Beatitudes apply to all Christians, in all ages and in all of the world. They are not referring to a select few. They are

not only applicable to spiritual giants. Neither are they only for Church leaders and Christian workers. Jesus teaches us that they are for every believer. All true believers are in Christ and are described in these verses. You might be a missionary or a coal miner, a preacher or a postman. That makes no difference, because the 'Beatitudes' apply to every Christian believer.

This is because they describe our character, not our gifts and abilities. We are all meant to be like this. And that is the challenge of these verses and the responsibility we must take seriously. And to encourage us to take our obligations seriously, each of these 'Beatitudes' tells us of the great blessings or privileges which belong to those described in them.

2) The meaning of 'Beatitude'

a. *Spiritual happiness*

These verses have been given the name 'Beatitudes'. That name means 'a declaration of blessedness', and you will see that each of them begins with the word "*Blessed*". The original Greek word means 'blessed' or 'happy' in the sense of true well-being or prosperity. In this context, Jesus teaches us that true prosperity or happiness is something spiritual. The prosperity of those described in these verses consists of heaven's blessings. They are recipients of divine favour. Therefore, this blessedness is the total of all the joys, and satisfaction, and fulfilment, and hope, and tranquillity of spirit that comes to those who experience God's salvation because they are at peace with him. And this is enjoyed regardless of outward circumstances and conditions. It is not dependent on

material prosperity, because it is produced by the grace of God, and unlike earthly happiness it endures.

b. *The emptiness of worldly happiness*

It is important to stress the inward spiritual nature of the blessedness that Jesus describes here, because we live in a world that is obsessed with pursuing happiness. This world defines happiness in terms of money, power, sex, drugs, occult activity, gambling, entertainment, and so on. It sees happiness in terms of things and outward circumstances, not something that affects the heart of man. But at the very best these things can only bring momentary happiness that soon evaporates and is gone. And at their worst these things bring misery, pain, despair and emptiness. It is possible to be the wealthiest person in the world and yet still fail to gain this inward spiritual blessedness in your soul. Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?*"

Lesson: Man's attempts to gain and achieve blessedness fail miserably, because they fail to deal with the real cause of our misery, which is our sinfulness, and they leave God out.

c. *Those who are truly blessed (happy)*

The descriptions given by the Lord Jesus in the 'Beatitudes' are exactly the opposite to the natural man's assessment of happiness. However, those that he describes are truly and lastingly happy and blessed. They enjoy ultimate well-being because they have spiritual joy, and share in the salvation of the kingdom of God. Further,

what Jesus describes is the only way to be truly happy because this is God's way. Though many may think Jesus' followers are unfortunate or wretched, in God's eyes they are happy indeed and lavishly blessed by him. Heaven's favours already rest upon them, and these are a foretaste of the full joys of heaven itself.

These 'Beatitudes' are an explanation of the truly spiritual person, the genuine Christian. They are a kind of biographical description of those who truly belong to the Lord Jesus Christ - a character study. While clearly there is an order in these descriptions, and we need to recognise that the first one does come first, it is also true that all of them will be reflected in the true Christian's character. Therefore, we are not to pick and choose which ones we shall apply to ourselves, but to accept all of them and aim to include them in our lives.

3) They describe spiritual qualities, not natural abilities

These are not either man-made characteristics, nor natural tendencies with which we are born. Only the Holy Spirit can produce these in us. The encouragement from this is that though we do not possess any likeness to these qualities naturally, we can be like this. This is what the grace of God is able to produce in us. For example, though we may have a natural tendency to be argumentative, by God's grace we can become meek.

These 'Beatitudes' pointedly reveal the difference that exists between the Christian believer and the unbeliever, between the saved and the lost, between those in God's kingdom and those outside it. Those who think and live like this are totally different from the lost and will be seen

to be different. This is because non-Christians live for this world and this life only, but Christian believers live for something much more glorious and eternal, the world to come. Therefore, Christian believers should long, desire and seek to be like this by God's help, for it is to be like Christ.

4) They describe the members of the kingdom of God

It is significant to note that Matthew 5:3 and Matthew 5:10 describe the blessedness of those referred to as "... *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*". Over the years some have tried to draw a distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, as if these were two entirely different kingdoms. However, a careful examination of parallel passages in the Gospels will reveal that they refer to the same thing, and here are some examples.

- In the discourse containing the parable of the sower, Matthew records Jesus' words to his disciples when they asked him to explain the meaning of the parable to them in Matthew 13:11. "*The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.*" Whereas Mark writes in Mark 4:11, "*The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you.*" So we can see that though they use the different titles they are both referring to the same kingdom.
- When Jesus begins his preaching ministry we read in Matthew 4:17, "*From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'*" But in Mark 1:15 we read, "*The kingdom of God is*

near.” And Luke tells us in Luke 4:43, “*I must preach the kingdom of God in the other towns also...*” and clearly Jesus did not preach two different messages.

Other parallel passages in the Gospels serve to underline this point.

But a question this raises is, ‘Why does Matthew in particular use the phrase “*the kingdom of heaven*” more than “*the kingdom of God*”?’ The answer is twofold, both coming from the fact that Matthew was writing primarily for a Jewish readership, and seeking to commend the gospel of Christ to them. Firstly, the Jews so revered the very name of God that they rarely used it lest they should misuse it. So out of respect for this, Matthew used “*the kingdom of heaven*” rather than “*the kingdom of God*”. Secondly, and more especially, because the prevailing Jewish understanding of the kingdom was that it was something earthly, political, military and material, whereas in fact the kingdom is spiritual. Consider the following Bible passages which make this clear. (Luke 17:20-21)

*“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘here it is,’ or ‘there it is’ because **the kingdom of God is within you.**”*

(John 18:36) *“Jesus said, **My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*

(Romans 14:17) *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, **but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...**”*

One Christian writer has said: “... *the kingdom indicates God’s kingship, rule or sovereignty, recognised in the hearts and operative in the lives of his people...*” The kingdom is where Christ is reigning and exercising his authority. So we can say:

- a. It was present when Jesus was on earth (Matthew 12:28): “... *if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come upon you.*”
- b. It is present now in the hearts of all true believers whose hearts have submitted to Christ. (Colossians 1:13) *“For he (i.e. God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves...”* (Philippians 3:20) *“But our citizenship (i.e. the kingdom to which we belong) is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...”* All who recognise Christ as their Lord today are in the kingdom of heaven.
- c. It will be present in the future when Christ returns and the kingdoms of this world will be the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Then everything material and spiritual will be under his dominion, sin and Satan will be banished, and the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness will be ushered in. (See 2 Peter 3:13; Philippians 2:10-11; Matthew 25:34.)

Conclusion

Therefore, as we look at these ‘Beatitudes’ we must ask the following questions:

- (i) Is this what I am like?
- (ii) Do I find I dislike them and think them too severe?
- (iii) Do I feel that I am unworthy but long to be like this more and more?

If you say ‘Yes’ to question (ii), then you cannot be a true Christian and are still without true spiritual life. (See 1 Corinthians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:1-2.) If you say ‘Yes’ to question (iii), then there must be spiritual life in you or else you would not have that desire, you must be God’s child and, therefore, are already in his kingdom.

Chapter 2 Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit”

Introduction

The words of this beatitude cut right across the way that many in our world think. Millions think it is the rich who are blessed, but Jesus said: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”*

Jesus taught this way because:-

- (i) Those riches and favourable outward conditions that the world seeks after are at least temporary and will all be left behind when death occurs. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:7, *“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.”* Concerning the rich man in the parable Luke records in Luke 12:20, *“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have provided for yourself.’”*

- (ii) What Jesus is describing is a spiritual quality which is something inward, something in the heart of a person. Very often God’s people are poor, but it is not poverty in itself which is commended here, but poverty of spirit. There is no special merit or advantage in being poor. This means that those who are rich in monetary terms can still be *“poor in spirit”*. Their riches do not exclude them from this, but they must not depend on their riches. And also those without material riches are not excluded either. They also can be *“poor in spirit”*.

1) Poor in spirit

This leads us to ask, ‘Exactly what did Jesus mean by these words?’

a. Absolutely nothing!

Interestingly, there are two words in the New Testament translated by the one word *“poor”*. One means just having barely enough to live on, while the other means being absolutely destitute, having nothing, even the lowest amount of money you can have. It is this second word that Jesus used in his description of the person who is truly blessed.

BUT notice it is *“poor in spirit”*, which is describing those who are convinced of their spiritual poverty. They know themselves to be spiritually destitute, and are in spiritual misery and need. They are so conscious of the seriousness of their sinful condition that they know they have nothing whatsoever to commend themselves to God. In contrast to God who is holy, they know they are sinful and undone. On their own they have no spiritual life and no means of obtaining it. (Romans 3:10-12):

“As it is written: ‘There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one.’”

(Romans 7:18) *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.”* Those who are truly poor in spirit know that these two Bible passages describe them personally. They are and know and feel spiritually poor. This is their attitude towards themselves.

b. Admitting it

What we have just said is very important because the truth is that everyone born into the world is spiritually destitute, for all have sinned (Romans.3: 23), and all are spiritually lifeless (Ephesians.2:1ff). **But not everyone acknowledges that fact.** Indeed, because of pride, most people think they are quite good and even deserve to be blessed by God. But these are not the *“blessed”* ones. By contrast, Jesus said it is those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty who are blessed. For them there is no self-reliance, no self-confidence, no self-assertion.

An example of this is seen in the change that took place in the life of Saul of Tarsus, or Paul, as he became known. Before he became a follower of the Lord Jesus he was a very proud man. He believed there were so many things about himself that were good and which placed him in a position of favour with God. He tells about them in Philippians 3:5f:

“... circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the Church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

But then the Lord Jesus met with him (see Acts 9), and showed him his sinfulness in the sight of God. And being aware of his spiritual wretchedness and poverty he turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and trusted in him. All those things that he had previously relied on to earn him favour with God he abandoned. He tells us in Philippians 3:7f:

“... whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

Another example is seen in Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:5: *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”* Paul did not promote himself when he went to Corinth, but proclaimed Christ. He knew his own spiritual poverty, and therefore would not parade himself proudly. Those who are genuinely poor in spirit do not go around parading that fact. Some people are proud of their humility! That is not being poor in spirit.

c. Christ is everything to them

The “*poor in spirit*” know their desperate need of God’s mercy and forgiveness. They feel unfit to be in the Lord’s presence (cf. Peter in Luke 5:8 and Isaiah in Isaiah 6:5). They know they need God to come to them and give them his salvation or else they will never obtain it. They know they are powerless to change their spiritual state. They openly admit they need God to do a work in their lives. They are like the tax-collector in Luke 18:13 who cried, “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*” Such people are contrite in spirit. (Isaiah 57:15)

“For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives for ever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

(Isaiah 66:2) *“... declares the Lord, ‘This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my word.’”*

The “*poor in spirit*” realise their own helplessness and look to God for everything. They do not trust in themselves; their natural abilities and gifts, their education or family or possessions or wealth or morality or conduct or anything about themselves. Indeed, their awareness of their sinfulness leads them to repent and to believe the glorious provision that God has made in the gospel. **Their whole trust is placed in the Lord Jesus Christ.** As the jailer was told in Acts 16:31, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*” Charles Wesley expressed it well in his hymn, “*Jesu, lover of my soul*”, where a verse declares:

*“Just and holy is your name,
I am all unrighteousness;
Vile and full of sin I am,
You are full of truth and grace.”*

2) Their blessedness

Jesus said, “... *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

We need to note this refers to the “*poor in spirit*” alone, and not to those who do not acknowledge their spiritual poverty.

Further, it belongs to them now. Already they are in the kingdom; already they are experiencing and enjoying God’s salvation. For them God is king over their lives. They own Christ as their Lord. They gladly submit to his rule and authority. They are under his dominion, love, provision and protection. And all of this will be true throughout all of their lives, and beyond that for evermore. They know that their Saviour, the Lord Jesus, is reigning now in heaven for their benefit. After the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead we read in Ephesians 1:20f that God

“... seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.”

The “*poor in spirit*” are, therefore, in the most blessed and secure place that it is possible to be in. They are already in God’s kingdom.

But please note, there is no one in the kingdom who is not poor in spirit. It is a principle of the gospel that conviction of sin must come before conversion. Without this awareness of their utter sinfulness, of their poverty of spirit, no one will see their need to be saved, and see their need to call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the sick who need a doctor, not the healthy. Likewise it is those aware and convinced of their sinfulness who feel their need of a Saviour.

3) How we become poor in spirit

To be poor in spirit is not something that we can manufacture. What is needed is for us to look at God, and what he is like, and what he requires of us, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We do this as we consider the Bible, his word to us. As we do that we shall become more and more aware of our spiritual poverty and spiritual bankruptcy, and will be compelled to cling to Christ and him alone, for salvation and righteousness. And for all who do trust in Christ, “*theirs is the kingdom of heaven*”.

4) Illustrations

- (i) People who thought they were rich when in fact they were poor. The Church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22.
 - (ii) People who thought they were poor when in fact they were rich. The Church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11.
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(ii) 3 Matthew 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn”

Introduction

Again we see that Jesus teaches us something that is the very opposite of the normal way our world considers things. The last people who would be considered “blessed” are those who mourn, yet the Lord clearly teaches the opposite.

1) What Jesus meant by those who ‘mourn’

The word used by Matthew means ‘to be sad, to lament, to feel grief, to mourn’. Now, in order to understand what Jesus was referring to, we need to be clear as to what kind of ‘mourning’ he was talking about. To do that we need to exclude some things, and also to see the link between this ‘Beatitude’ and the one before it. This is because there are many different things that can make us sad and from which many in our world never find any relief at all.

a. Negatively, the kind of mourning Jesus does not mean

- (i) It is quite clear that Jesus is not speaking of mourning over the death of someone. This is because not everyone who mourns like that is always comforted. There are many people in our world who are filled with inconsolable grief when a loved one dies and who never recover from that state of sorrow.
- (ii) Jesus is also not referring to mourning over the loss of some valuable possessions, for example, when something is stolen from us, or we lose our job, or when the economics of our country fails and a lot of money is lost. Again many people remain devastated by such experiences throughout their lives.

- (iii) It also cannot refer to mourning over some illness because, again, a large number of illnesses are terminal or give constant and increased pain, and comfort for many in that situation is never enjoyed.
- (iv) It also does not refer to mourning over our wounded pride, because many in our world remain resentful of that kind of experience all their days and refuse to be comforted.

Therefore, we must say that Jesus was referring to some other kind of mourning, because those who do mourn in this way are comforted. And that means all of them.

We must add, of course, that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to help us in every sad situation we face, but that is not what he is referring to here.

b. Positively, the kind of mourning Jesus did mean

Jesus was teaching about ‘spiritual mourning’ and by that we mean genuine sorrow over one’s personal sin. It is the response of a heart that knows it has failed God; that knows it has disobeyed God; that knows it has broken his laws, that knows it has sinned against God. It is the response of someone who readily acknowledges both the holiness and goodness of God, and that their own disobedience has disregarded these things and grieved him. It is the person who realises that, though God has been kind to them in giving them life, they have acted as if he did not exist. It is the person who knows that they have not submitted to God and his ways as revealed in the Bible. It is godly sorrow.

c. A careful distinction to note

Now, at this point we must draw a careful distinction between remorse and mourning over sin. Many feel a sense of remorse over their sin. They realise they have done something wrong and foolish and regretful. They wish they had not acted or spoken in a certain way, because they have suffered as a consequence of their stupidity. For example, they may have said something unkind or untruthful about someone and been discovered by others who now despise them for what they said. This makes them feel very uncomfortable and remorseful that they have been discovered, but that is really only a feeling of self-pity. Another example is seen with many thieves. They experience remorse when they have been caught, but are only sorry because it means they will be fined or imprisoned for their actions. They are not sorry for stealing, and this is seen later because they continue to steal.

Spiritual mourning, godly sorrow, is grief about offending God. It is not grief at merely being discovered, but sorrow that God has been sinned against. And further, this is mourning that leads to repentance. This is explained in 2 Corinthians 7:10:

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

An example of this worldly sorrow, or remorse, is seen in Judas Iscariot. Having betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver he felt great remorse but never repented of what he had done and ended up killing himself (Matthew 27:1-5). By contrast, an example of true spiritual mourning is seen

in the life of Peter. When Jesus was arrested just before his crucifixion, Peter was accused of being one of his disciples. Sadly, Peter denied that he ever knew Jesus, and he did so three times. But then he realised what he had done. Luke tells us in Luke 22:61f:

“Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

Peter felt extreme grief that he had failed the Lord Jesus and had been unfaithful to him. He loved Jesus very much and felt pain, not that he had been discovered, but because of the wrong he himself had done. Later on, after Jesus rose from the grave, he gave Peter the opportunity to declare afresh that he did, in fact, love him. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he still loved him, and on each occasion Peter replied, ‘Yes’ (John 21:15ff).

Those who mourn in the way Jesus is referring to, feel both deep sorrow for their sins and desire to turn from and to forsake them. This mourning is linked with and comes from the previous ‘Beatitude’ where Jesus spoke about *“the poor in spirit”*. It is those who feel their spiritual bankruptcy who mourn deeply over their sinful spiritual condition. The difference between this mourning and remorse is that remorse is self-centred whereas spiritual mourning is God-centred.

2) How and why such mourners are comforted

Jesus is quite explicit when he declares that these mourners, and he is referring to all of them, will be comforted. There is no question about it, all of them are promised this consolation. Now we need to see why that is so.

It is because all who feel like this are driven to seek mercy from God. While they know they are unworthy to approach God, they cannot stay away from him, for unless he pardons them they know they will perish. It is him they have offended. It is him they have wronged. It is from him, therefore, that they seek mercy and pardon by humbly confessing and forsaking their sin. They know they cannot remain in this tragic spiritual condition a moment longer and, therefore, flee to God for refuge. They see their great need of a Saviour and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ to deliver them from their sins. The result is that God pardons all who seek him like this. He forgives all their iniquity, cleanses, saves, strengthens and reassures each one of them that their sins have been pardoned.

Some may ask, ‘Well, how can God who is holy forgive men who are sinful?’ The answer is because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Consider these Bible verses that tell us why Jesus was crucified. (1 Peter 3:18) *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”* (1 Peter 2:24) *“He himself (ie. Jesus)*

bore our sins in his body on the tree (i.e. the cross), so that we may die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds we are healed.” The Lord Jesus Christ took the punishment for the sins of all who will turn to him for

pardon and, therefore, God is able to forgive the guilty who humbly seek his mercy. Hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth Isaiah the prophet wrote about his death in Isaiah 53:5:

“... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him...”

And, therefore, God brings the comfort of this good news to all who are conscious of their sin and who turn to God in repentance and place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Their sins are covered (Psalm 32:1-2), they are removed (Psalm 103:11-12), they are buried (Micah 7:19), they are remembered against them no more (Jeremiah 31:34). The burden of their sin is lifted from them. The barrier it caused between them and God is removed. They are accepted by God and have peace with him through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). God assures them they will not be condemned (Romans 8:1), nor will they be banished from heaven but given a place there (John 14:1-3, 1 Peter 1:3-5). They are comforted by God himself, for they see the Lord Jesus Christ as the perfect and only solution to these deepest of spiritual needs. The result of this is that God turns their mourning into comfort, and their sorrow to joy.

This mourning does not mean the Christian is miserable, but serious. And because he is serious about his sin he looks to God and receives his pardon and experiences the joy of his salvation. There is an important lesson demonstrated in this ‘Beatitude’, which is that there must be conviction and sorrow for sin before anyone can know

conversion and the joy of the forgiveness of sin. You cannot have the conversion and joy without this mourning for sin. And all who do so mourn will be comforted

3) Wider application of spiritual mourning

a. Mourning in the Christian’s life

Once someone has become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, their sins are forgiven. But that is not the end of their mourning. Whilst we do not grieve as once we did, yet the Christian believer continues to mourn over that sin which remains in his life. Paul expressed this in Romans 7:18f:

“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have a desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

The repentance we exercise at the commencement of the Christian life is something that continues throughout all of our earthly days. While every Christian believer rejoices with great joy because the Lord has pardoned him, running parallel with that the true believer will feel his sense of sinfulness daily, will mourn over it, and long to be different, to be more like Christ. He will continue to repent, and continue to enjoy the comfort of God’s forgiveness.

b. Mourning over the sins of the world

While primarily this mourning is over one's own sin, those who do turn to God will discover as they progress in the Christian life that they will be grieved by the sin in the world around them. They will mourn over the way men live without any regard for God and break his laws and blaspheme his name. Corruption, injustice, hatred, violence, deceit, unfaithfulness, abuse of children, murders, thefts, immorality, drug abuse, assaults, and all the other examples of man's sinfulness, will cause the spiritually minded person great sadness (see Daniel 9:1-20, Psalm 139:21, Psalm 119:136). This also creates within the Christian believer the determination to flee from sin in all its forms, and a longing for that time when sin will trouble us no more, and to which we now turn.

c. Eternal comfort for the believer

The comfort which is experienced in this life is a foretaste of the everlasting comfort we shall enjoy in the presence of Christ for evermore. A day is coming when sin will bother the Christian no more. Then it will be banished and then God will wipe every tear from our eyes (Revelation 7:17, 21:1-4, 21:27, and see also Romans 8:22-25). For the Christian there is this wonderful assurance that glory awaits him with Christ for evermore. Indeed, we shall see Christ face to face and be like him (1 John 3:1-3). This is why the Christian is the 'blessed' or 'happy' person, because he knows that in Christ, God has dealt with sin.

Chapter 4 Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek"

Introduction

This is the third 'Beatitude' in Matthew 5 and it is a progression from the previous two. Like the steps of a ladder, one leads to the next. Just as the poor in spirit become those who mourn, so also those who mourn become meek. There is an order here. All true Christian believers will acknowledge their poverty of spirit and will mourn over their sin and will consequently be meek. This 'Beatitude' is also found in Psalm 37:11.

1) The meaning of meekness

The term used in this verse literally means meek, gentle, kind, and forgiving. It describes someone who has a humble spirit, and is the opposite to the pride and arrogance which characterises unbelievers. Again this is not a quality particularly sought after by the world. The world's way is to be self assertive, to push oneself forward, to show that you are better than others, to parade self, to be aggressive.

Meekness is a quality that is seen in two ways. It describes the believer's attitude before God, and it describes the believer's attitude before men.

a. Before God

The meek submit to God, and this is seen in two ways.

- (i) ***They submit to God's word, the Bible.*** They eagerly expect to learn from God when the Bible is read and explained in order to obey what God commands. The meek do not rebel or kick against or argue with God's word, the Bible. They acknowledge it is right, especially when it exposes their sin, and they desire and strive to conform to its instructions.

(ii) ***They submit to God's sovereign will in all their circumstances.*** They acknowledge God's providential dealings with them are always best, whether it means enjoying plenty or having little, whether it means ease or facing difficulty. They not only know that God has the right to do with them as he pleases, but they are glad that this is so, for they commit themselves to him unreservedly (see Proverbs 3:5-6). Because of this, the meek are not resentful towards God over difficult experiences, but humbly accept that God is working his purpose out for both his glory and praise and their eternal good. They would not dream of thinking they deserved God's special favour, for they know they are sinners in God's sight and, therefore, have no merit of their own to present to him at all. (See also Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:11-13; and Eli's words in 1 Samuel 3:18.)

The source of this meekness is God himself. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and produced by him (Galatians 5:23). It is seen supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ, who willingly submitted to God's will for him, though it meant the cross, and who submitted to God's word perfectly so that he was not guilty of any sin. For the meek, the Lord Jesus is gladly accepted as their pattern and standard. And as we shall never be perfect or sinless in this life (1 John 1), the meek know they have absolutely no reasons for being proud. Therefore, the meek do not boast about self, or parade themselves before God. They are not self-opinionated or haughty. And so meekness prepares us for

communion with God through Christ, and affects our relationships with others.

b. Before men

The meek do not consider themselves better than others, for they are aware of their own many failings. This influences their relationship with others in three ways.

(i) ***The meek are not quick to retaliate when injured by others.*** The meek bear with them, even when that suffering is unjust! Indeed, this is to be like the Lord Jesus, as Peter explains in 1 Peter 2:21-23: "*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'* ***When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.***"

Meekness restrains sinful anger and checks us, keeping us from being hasty and quick to lash out. The meek follow the wise counsel of Ephesians 4:26-27: "*In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.*" (See also Ecclesiastes 7:9.) Meekness prevents malice and evil thoughts against others. It is not full of revenge nor easily provoked (see Proverbs 19:11). Meekness restrains the tongue from speaking evil about others, because it does not issue abuse, insults or anything designed to be destructive (Ephesians 4:31; 1 Peter 3:9). The meek person has died to self-righteousness and therefore knows he has no cause to boast of!

Perhaps the hardest thing that meekness brings is the acceptance of others being right when they point out our sins! It is hard enough to admit to ourselves our sinfulness, but when others point it out we want to fight that and defend ourselves. But meekness causes us to agree with them and not resent them!

- (ii) ***The meek are quick to forgive others who do wrong to them.*** This is because they are so conscious of the enormity of their own sins which the Lord Jesus has forgiven, therefore, it is but a little thing to forgive those who sin against them. The Lord has commanded this of them (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; Mark 11:25). The meek do not bear grudges, but forgive fully and do not delight to drag up the past once it has been forgiven.
- (iii) ***The meek go even further, for they return evil with good.*** (See Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:20; 1 Peter 3:9.)

The meek are not guilty of false humility which parades itself, but are truly unassuming. They find their refuge in the Lord. Meekness is a quality of great strength, because it is not weakness, but rather is submissive when provoked, willing to suffer rather than to hurt others. How this was displayed in Moses who was the meekest of all men on the earth (Numbers 12:3)! When the people murmured against him, he was found praying for them (Exodus 15:24-25). The meek leave everything in the Lord's hands.

2) Their blessedness

Jesus said that the meek "... shall inherit the earth". This is seen in two ways.

- (i) ***It is already true of the meek.*** This is because they are seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness first. And that means, therefore, that all other things are being graciously bestowed on them (Matthew 6:33), and they are content (Philippians 4:11). By contrast, many who are rich in this world are possessed by their riches. Further, their meekness makes them a means of blessing to others, some of whom bless them in return (see Mark 10:30; Acts 2:44-45; 16:15; Philippians 4:18).
- (ii) ***It will reach its greatest fulfilment in the new heavens and new earth.*** The Lord Jesus Christ shall return and this earth as we know it will be destroyed by fire and melt in the heat (2 Peter 3:7 & 10-12). The new heavens and earth will be ushered in, and it will be characterised by righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). There will be nothing in it to mar or spoil the eternal joy of the people of God who have displayed this meekness (Revelation 21:1-5, 27).

There the meek shall dwell with Christ for evermore.

Chapter 5 Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"

Introduction

It has been said that you do not need to tell a starving man that he is hungry, he is fully aware of his need for food! In a similar way this is true spiritually. Those who are poor in

spirit are aware of their need for righteousness. Their awareness of their sinfulness makes them long for righteousness, the very thing they do not possess! But there the similarity ends because no one would say to a starving man that he was blessed because he was hungry for food. Yet Jesus teaches that those who are spiritually hungry are blessed!

The reason for this is twofold.

- (i) That they would not be spiritually hungry if the Holy Spirit was not already at work in their hearts. For it is he who gives us spiritual life (John 3:1-8) and makes us convinced of our sinfulness and need of righteousness (John 16:5-11).
- (ii) Jesus assures us that all who hunger in this way will be filled. That cannot be said of all who hunger for food in our world, for many of them tragically die every day.

1) What it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness

Righteousness means to be right with God. And to be right with God means to have perfect conformity to his law. It is to be fully obedient to all God's commands. It is to be fully pleasing to him who is absolutely pure and holy. Unrighteousness is the opposite to this. Unrighteousness means disobedience to God's law and rebellion against his revealed will in the Bible. It is to be sinful, unclean and unfit to approach God.

Those whom Jesus is describing here know full well that they are unrighteous and, therefore, unfit to come into the presence of God. They know they are sinful. Their poverty of spirit, and grief over their sin, and meekness

compel them both to admit their wickedness and long for righteousness. They long to be in that position where they are accepted by God. They long to be pleasing to God. They long for something they know they do not naturally possess. This longing described by Jesus as 'hungering and thirsting' is very intense. It grips their whole being. For them this is a life and death situation of even greater seriousness than hungering for food to eat, because this is to meet their spiritual and eternal need. They need and want this more than anything else. This is the priority in their lives, to be right with God. To be acceptable to him is of more importance to them than anything else in all the world. They are now God-centred in their thinking, and to be pleasing to him is the great pre-eminent concern of their lives. Once they thought little about God and cared little about their sin, but now all that is changed.

2) The source of true righteousness

a. Where it is not obtained

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness have long given up the forlorn hope that they may somehow produce this righteousness themselves. If that were possible they would no longer need to hunger and thirst for it, for they would already possess it within themselves, but they do not. They agree with Isaiah who wrote (Isaiah 64:6):

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

They know that at their very best they are still sinners. They know that sin permeates their whole being and affects all they do and say and think and are. So they no longer proudly and foolishly think they can produce a righteousness which God will accept from within themselves. Yet they long for the very thing they know they lack. Therefore, they look away from themselves and look to God for this vital righteousness they so desperately need.

b. Where it is obtained

The wonder of it is that God has provided the very thing that these dear people crave for, perfect righteousness. How has he done this? Through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to earth and lived a life of perfect obedience to all God's will. His was a righteousness of infinite proportions. He never committed any sin nor was deceit ever found in his mouth.

Negatively, the Lord Jesus never once gave in to sin and temptation, even though he faced onslaught after onslaught of attack by Satan. In addition to his well-known temptations in the desert, Luke reminds us that this was not the end of the matter. Luke 4:13: *"When the devil had finished all this tempting he left him until an opportune time."* Throughout his life he was opposed by his enemies, until their hatred against him exploded into their cries for him to be crucified. Yet in spite of all this we read in Hebrews 4:15,

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who

has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin."

Positively, the Lord Jesus perfectly obeyed all that his Father had asked him to do. With regard to the Law of God, he kept it scrupulously. None could find fault in him. He never once failed to obey it. And further, in his obedience he willingly laid down his life because this was his Father's will, that thereby he might redeem his people from their sins (Philippians 2:8):

"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross."

By his death the Lord Jesus Christ atoned for sin, bearing its punishment in his own body, so that Christian believers are able to say he was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was the perfect and only sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 9:26):

"But now he (i.e. Jesus) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."

(See Hebrews 9:12.) Such obedience was not something that was at all easy, but extremely costly to the Lord Jesus, yet he perfectly obeyed.

It is this righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ which alone can fully satisfy God's demands. And it is this righteousness that God imputes, or credits, to all who in hunger and thirst seek him for it! 2 Corinthians 5:2:

“God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

1 Corinthians 1:30: *“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”*

All who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are declared righteous by God. Paul, writing about the way that God credited righteousness to Abraham because he believed God, wrote in Romans 4:23:

“The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone (i.e. Abraham), but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

All those who long for this righteousness look to Christ and receive it. It is his righteousness, not theirs. It is provided by God alone and, therefore, is entirely by his grace alone. The moment they believed they were justified by faith (Romans 5:1) and shall never be more justified than on that day. They are accepted by God as possessing Christ’s righteousness. No wonder Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness would be satisfied! - *“... they will be filled.”*

But we can go further because the marvellous thing is that to those whom God imputes or credits the righteousness of Christ, he also begins to impart righteousness. That

imparted righteousness means simply that they begin to live in a righteous way themselves. Though they are never entirely free

from sin in this life (1 John 1), yet they actually become more and more holy. They know increasing victory over sin in their lives as Christ empowers them by his Spirit, so they grow more and more Christ-like. And they delight in righteousness now, both in themselves and as they see it produced in others. They are transformed and become completely new people. 2 Corinthians 5:17:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

So again, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness continue to be filled in this way as well.

3) The certainty of being filled

What is so encouraging is that Jesus declares that all who long for righteousness in this way - every one of them - will be filled. They will have his righteousness credited to them and also it will be imparted to them. This is not something that is in question, or over which there is any doubt. It is guaranteed, assured by Jesus himself. Already we have noted that not all who hunger for food or thirst for drink have these things met. Some tragically die. But that is not so in the spiritual life. All of them are filled. This is why all who hunger and thirst after righteousness are called *“Blessed”* - their spiritual hunger is fully met by the Lord himself.

Chapter 6 Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful”

Introduction

The term ‘mercy’ as it is used in the Bible has particular reference to the misery people are in, and in particular the distress which sin causes. It literally means ‘to pity’, ‘to feel compassion’, ‘to commiserate with’.

There are two examples later in Matthew’s Gospel that illustrate this. The first refers to the two blind men who called to Jesus for help (Matthew 9:27): *“As Jesus went out from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David.’”* The second is the Canaanite woman with a demon-possessed daughter (Matthew 15:22):

“A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.’”

In a very selfish and self-centred world where it is the law of the jungle, the survival of the fittest and the victimisation of the needy, and where many are driven by a selfish ambition which doesn’t mind whom it hurts as long as it attains its goal, this ‘Beatitude’ stands in sharp contrast. Mercy reaches out to the downcast, the injured, the weak, and the guilty, not to crush but to restore them.

1) Why the merciful are merciful

a. *The source of this characteristic*

The followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are merciful because God has been at work in their lives. They are those who know they deserve none of God’s favours because they are sinful. They already acknowledge they

are poor in spirit (v3), and mourn over their sinfulness (v4), and walk humbly before God (v5). The result of this is that God has forgiven them. God has reached out to them in his grace, has pardoned their sin, brought them into his kingdom, and satisfied their longing for righteousness (v6). These are those who know God has bestowed on them his salvation, and that they did not deserve any of it. They deserved judgment, but they were given pardon. They deserved condemnation, but were given justification. They deserved separation from God, but received reconciliation. They deserved hell, but are assured of a place in heaven. As God saw them in all their misery resulting from their sinfulness, he bestowed upon them incredible mercy, when he could have destroyed them, and done so justly. So the merciful are those who have already received mercy from God.

b. *The cost of this mercy*

The merciful realise that the mercy they have received from God was accomplished at infinite cost, not to them the guilty ones, but to God, the one who was offended. He gave that unspeakable gift of his own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not spare him, though he was eternally precious to him. He delivered the Lord Jesus Christ over to death on the cross in the place of his people and for their sins. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered the agony of crucifixion and separation from his Father as the holy wrath of God fell on him instead of the sinners who deserved it. And the Lord Jesus Christ did this willingly; such was his love for both his Father and his people. And those who are merciful know already that mercy has been

shown to them by God at an incredible cost to him. This is why the mercy Jesus referred to in this 'Beatitude' is a distinctly Christian virtue. Other people in our world do show mercy to others, but the Christian believer does so because of his own experience of God's mercy to him. Their mercy grows out of their gratitude for his mercy.

c. A mistake to avoid

There have been some who have misunderstood this 'Beatitude'. They have claimed it teaches salvation by works. In other words, they think we receive mercy because we have earned it by being merciful to others. Those who take this approach not only do so in the face of the rest of the Bible which teaches salvation is by grace alone (see Ephesians 2:8-9), but also they ignore the very context in which this verse is found. It is the fifth 'Beatitude', not the first. There is a clear order in which Jesus deals with the matter of their sin first. This 'Beatitude' is the result of the previous four, not the cause of them.

2) How God's mercy affects the merciful

As they realise that God has been so merciful to them, pitying them in all their guilt and misery and when they did not deserve it, they in turn become merciful to others. This is seen in two ways.

a. When they are sinned against

When others do wrong to them they do not act in revenge, but with forgiveness. Their pattern is God's mercy to them and described by Paul in Ephesians 4:32:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

They do not find this is beyond their ability because God has given them new hearts that are like his own. As they remember how God dealt with them when they deserved destruction, they find it a small thing to forgive the relatively little things done against them. The merciful do not bear grudges nor plan retaliation.

They consider the example of Jesus and seek to follow him (1 Peter 2:21-23):

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

Further, the merciful make the first move to bring about reconciliation. This is the very opposite to the attitude of the unmerciful servant in the parable in Matthew 18:23-35. He made the first move to inflict revenge!

To take this initiative in seeking reconciliation is not something easy, as the natural reaction when we are hurt is to hit back. Also, it is not mercy at any cost either. For example, some will compromise doctrine for a quiet life, but that is not mercy, that is weakness. True mercy is strong and courageous, it does not condone sin, but it does forgive it. This forgiving response is produced by the Holy Spirit so that the merciful pity those still in the grip of sin,

and are filled with compassion when that sin displays itself, even though they themselves are on the receiving end of the wrong done.

b. When faced with people in need

They are filled with compassion as they see the awful misery that sin produces in people's lives. When they see the mess people have made of their lives, they do not harshly criticise like the self-righteous Pharisees, for they remember they were in a similar spiritual state themselves once. Instead, they ask themselves, 'What can I do to help?'

This applies when the misery experienced is a direct result of some personal sin or simply the misery we experience from living in a sinful world. Like the Lord Jesus, they reach out to people to help them. They get alongside them. They weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). They seek to relieve the needs of the poor. They comfort the sad, help the foolish, and give support to those who have failed. The merciful have a tremendous love for those in misery, and do all they can to relieve them.

There are many examples of this in the Bible. The parable Jesus told about the Good Samaritan is one such case (Luke 10:25-37). For other examples see Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Colossians 3:12-14; James 1:27.

The merciful realise God has been wonderfully kind and compassionate to them and, therefore, they seek to imitate that by being kind to others. This mercy is shown to fellow Christians, but it is not restricted to them, and even includes our enemies (Galatians 6:10; Matthew 5:43-48).

3) How the merciful are blessed

Jesus said, "... *they shall obtain mercy.*"

We have already seen that the merciful are merciful because God has already shown them mercy. But now the Lord Jesus Christ assures them they will receive yet more mercy from God. (See also James 2:13; Matthew 6:14; Mark 11:25-26; Colossians 3:13; Luke 6:37-38.) In other words, God's forgiveness and compassion flow out to them from his heart.

You see, even as Christian believers, the merciful are conscious that they still stumble and fall into sin, but the Lord continues to have mercy on them. When they repent the Lord keeps on forgiving them. And further, they will be delivered from the final wrath which is to come on this world (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

In addition, God surrounds them with his compassion when they face the many difficulties that living in a sinful world brings to us all. Eventually God's mercy will be displayed, as they are welcomed into heaven. Charles Spurgeon has written, "*What we are to others, God will be to us.*" (See also 2 Samuel 22:26; Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:37-38.)

Failure to be merciful shows that such a person is not one of those described in Matthew 5:3ff, and to remain like that will be disastrous (Matthew 6:15). David expresses it quite dramatically in Psalm 66:18:

"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened..."

(See also James 2:13.) Applying this to our present context we can say, ‘If I am forgiven I will forgive others, and if I forgive others I will be forgiven.’

Chapter 7 Matthew 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart”

Introduction

The world we live in is a very sad world because it is so impure. Sin abounds in every area of life, and it is glamorised by the media in films, programmes and newspaper articles. Indeed, it is considered normal for people to live immoral, dishonest, untruthful lives. Very few have any concern about purity of life. This is because not many have any real awareness of God, who is absolutely holy, pure, and spotless. And further, what the Bible describes in Hebrews 11:25 as “... *the pleasures of sin...*”, are exploited heavily and promoted without any regard to the consequences. Indeed, many have seen the only possible way for them to make progress in their careers, is to succumb to impure living. All of this is a great tragedy and, in fact, does not bring the lasting happiness which many claim it does. The “*pleasures of sin*” very quickly turn sour and only succeed in producing misery in many people’s lives.

By great contrast, the Lord Jesus teaches us that the path to true blessing, to lasting, satisfying, meaningful joy, is not found in the way of sinfulness but in purity of heart. The way that the world teaches and considers right, is not only false, but exactly the opposite to the right way, the way taught by the Lord Jesus Christ.

1) The pure in heart

Who are the pure in heart? This is not an idle question, nor one that does not need to be addressed, because anyone who has even a small understanding of their own heart will know that they are sinful. Elsewhere in the Bible we are taught that all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Further, the apostle John in his first letter states (1 John 1:10):

“If we claim we have not sinned, we make him (i.e. God) out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

Even Christians do wrong! There is no excuse for that, but sadly we do sin still. Added to that, our consideration of the previous ‘Beatitudes’ has also underlined that truth. For example, the “*poor in spirit*” are those who know and acknowledge their spiritual poverty because they are sinners. So immediately we have a problem to deal with. Who are the pure in heart?

To begin with we must remind ourselves of something we have already seen with these ‘Beatitudes’. These qualities which Jesus is describing are not natural qualities, but rather they are produced by God the Holy Spirit in the hearts of true believers. We have already seen that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled (see chapter 5). They are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Though by nature they are sinners, by God’s grace they are declared righteous in his sight and are accepted by him. The spotless righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ has been imputed or credited to them. This is not something they achieved by their own efforts. God did it

for them. By his Spirit he has changed their hearts. As they have cried unto God he has cleansed them of all their sin through the precious blood of Christ (1 John 1:7), they have been redeemed (Ephesians 1:7, 1 Peter 1:18-21). They have been cleansed from their sin and clothed in the spotless righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, one of the effects of that transaction is that those who long to be pure actually begin to be pure. They begin to have new desires for holiness. Indeed purity of life becomes something incredibly attractive to them. And at the same time they begin to recognise the loathsomeness of sin. They love purity and hate uncleanness. The result of this is that their lives begin to change. Old sins that soiled their lives are thrown off. New virtues that they previously lacked are now taken on board. They desire above all else to be like Christ and so to honour God in their lives. Or, as Jesus declared in this verse, they are *“pure in heart”*. In the very centre of their being, their mind and will and emotions are clean and are in tune with God.

What Jesus is describing here is much more than merely outward conformity to a set of rules and regulations. The Pharisees did that but were certainly not pure in heart. (See Matthew 24 for Jesus’ analysis of the Pharisees, who were so full of outward things that they neglected the state of their own hearts.) When the pure in heart are confronted with sin in any form, it is repugnant to them, not in any self-righteous way, but because they realise it is an offence to God and grieves him. When they see sin in their own lives they grieve over it and seek to mortify it, putting it to

death, because they know it displeases God (Romans 8:13):

“... but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

So they have this insatiable desire to be holy, because God, whom they love, is a holy God. They strive to please him. They seek to live in accord with his will revealed in the Bible. They want to be guided by God and obedient to God (Psalm 119:11). They truly want to please and glorify God in their lives and, therefore, turn from all hypocrisy. They love to worship God in spirit and in truth. They love the things that God loves, and hate the things that God hates. They are not yet perfect, nor sinless, and shall not be until they reach heaven, but in their hearts these are the things they long for.

There are many examples in the Bible of what this means, and here are a few. Philippians 2:1-4:

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Philippians 4:8-9: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure,*

whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me - put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

2 Timothy 2:22: *"Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."*

James 1:27: *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*

Deep inside, *"the pure in heart"* long to know more about God and to become more like him. In short, the pure in heart are the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are genuine Christian believers.

2) The blessing they are promised

The Lord Jesus said, *"they shall see God."* This is a most remarkable blessing that is promised to the pure in heart.

We need to emphasise that the Bible teaches that holiness is essential if we are to enjoy this blessing that Jesus has promised. Hebrews 12:14:

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one shall see the Lord."

Psalms 24:3-4: *"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false."*

And we may well ask, 'What does this mean that they shall see God?' Really two things are included in this promised blessing. Part of it is true now in this life, and part of it awaits us in the life to come.

a. In this life

Already the pure in heart have an awareness of God in a spiritual sense. Already they have come to know God personally. They discern or see God in so many things. They see that God is incredibly gracious because they know he was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. They see God in the unfolding events; not only of world history, but of their own lives in particular, as he works out his sovereign purpose for them. They see him as King and Lord of all. They see that God is altogether glorious and that his creation declares something of his vastness, power, and wisdom. They see the beauty of his character as it is revealed in the Bible. They see him in the sense of knowing him and being aware that he is near and enjoying fellowship with him now. All these things are seen through the eye of faith by the Christian now. Like Moses of old in this spiritual sense we see him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27)!

b. In the life to come

The full accomplishment of this promise lies in the future. This will be in heaven at death, and then in the new heavens and new earth at the end of time. In a very real way what Jesus describes here is beyond our full comprehension in this life, yet we have glimpses of it revealed to us by God in the Bible. This glorious fact was in the Psalmist's mind when he wrote in Psalm 17:15:

“And I - in righteousness I shall see your face; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with seeing your likeness.”

Then the request of the Lord Jesus in John 17:24 will be fulfilled:

“Father, I want those you have given to me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

Then we will enjoy the truth declared by John in his first letter (1 John 3:2):

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

It is when the fulfilment of Paul’s words in Philippians 3:20-21 will take place:

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Paul referred to this in 1 Thessalonians 5 and concluded his statement there with these marvellous words in verse 17, *“And so we will be with the Lord for ever.”* In other words, *“the pure in heart”* will enjoy unending communion and blessedness forever in the presence of God.

What a glorious future awaits all who are pure in heart. We are going to spend eternity in God’s glorious presence and enjoy him in fullness for evermore! Nothing that this polluted world can offer us can compare with that! And this in turn itself has a purifying effect on us as John wrote in 1 John 3:3, *“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.”* And that is the test that we are indeed looking to God alone to make us pure in heart.

Chapter 8 Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peace makers”

Introduction

Before coming to what is involved in ‘peace-making’ we must first take note of the position of this ‘Beatitude’ in relation to what has preceded it. This verse describes those who are already at peace with God themselves.

The reason for making such a statement is found in Matthew 5:3ff. The ‘Beatitudes’ begin by describing those who were not at peace with God, but rather in inner turmoil because of their awareness of their sin. They were poor in spirit. In other words they knew they were sinners. And the sinful mind is hostile to God (Romans 8:7). They were deeply aware that the wrath of God rested over them (Ephesians 2:3), and that they were living in open rebellion against God. In other words, a state of spiritual war existed between them and God. The consequence was that they began to mourn over their sin, and longed to be righteous in God’s sight. And the Lord has already responded to their need, giving them his kingdom, comforting them, and satisfying their desperate need for righteousness. By his

grace, they have been reconciled to God. They enjoy fellowship with God and know his presence with them. They no longer rebel against him but delight to submit and obey his commands. They join the Psalmist in saying (Psalm 119:97), *“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”* Being already justified by faith (see chapter 5), they have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Now it is not God’s wrath that hangs over them but his love, which has been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

The fruit of the previous ‘Beatitudes’ is that they are now Christian believers and are at peace with God. All the old hostility is gone. They can approach God with boldness and godly fear (Hebrews 4:16, 12:28). The “peacemakers” are those who realise the incredible kindness of God to them in forgiving their sinful hostility to him and removing his hostility to them through Christ’s death (Colossians 1:19-20):

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (ie. the Lord Jesus Christ), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

The result is that their lives are transformed, and now they themselves have become peacemakers, following their Saviour, who is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

1) What is ‘peacemaking’?

The term used means ‘to make peace’ or ‘to restore concord and unity’ and this is worked out in a number of ways by those who are peacemakers.

a. Between men and God

Having come to the joyful position of being at peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and having come to it when they deserved condemnation and destruction, they are so overwhelmed at God’s mercy that they cannot keep it to themselves. As they consider others who are still in a state of rebellion and hostility with God, their hearts are filled with deep concern and pity for them. They can no longer selfishly keep God’s reconciling mercy to themselves, but are compelled by a love for God and for men to tell them of the salvation in Christ that can change this hostility into peace with God. They do all they can to urge men and women to repent and seek God’s forgiveness by placing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In so doing they do not speak of peace at any price by compromising on doctrine to make things easier for sinners. No, they declare faithfully the truth about God’s holiness and justice which must punish sin, as well as his love and mercy in Christ. They call sin what it is - sin! They do not pretend that sin does not exist, nor that it is not as important or serious as it is in God’s eyes. But at the same time as telling men and women of God’s reaction to their sinfulness, they also speak of Christ, the Saviour of sinners, that God in his love has provided (Psalm 2:2):

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flair up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

In addition, they spend much time in prayer for the salvation of the lost, for only God can save and reconcile sinners to himself. They also ask for God-given opportunities to tell others about Christ, and the great things he has done for them. They invite people to hear the gospel preached. They share the message of the Bible with people themselves. They give so that others can proclaim Christ. They do all they can to bring lost rebellious sinners to be at peace with God through Christ.

b. Between men and men

Peacemakers are not argumentative, hostile, malicious disturbers of the peace. Paul's instructions characterise them. Romans 12:18:

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

2 Timothy 2:22: *“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.”*

True peacemakers love all men, their fellow believers and even their enemies. Therefore, when men are hostile to each other they seek to restore unity. This displays itself in two main areas.

(i) When men are hostile to them - they do not seek revenge

They make the first move to resolve the situation. They do their utmost to restore friendly relations (Romans 14:19):

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” The Lord Jesus is their pattern

(1 Peter 2:20-23): *“... if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges rightly.”*

When they are the cause of the difficulty themselves, they are quick to say sorry and humbly to apologise. When wronged by others they are willing to forgive and not bear a grudge.

Again we must stress this is not peace at any price. They do not compromise, but they are willing to forego their rights in order to further fellowship. They battle against evil and for what is right and true (Hebrews 12:14):

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord.”
This is to be truly wise

(James 3:17-18): *“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”*

(ii) When men are hostile to others - they seek to mediate.

The peacemakers speak a calming word. They do not gossip and stir things up. They know and practise the truth of Proverbs 15:1: *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”* They will seek to mediate in the dispute. This will involve great wisdom and grace, but the peacemakers, depending entirely on God to help them, will do all they can to relieve and reconcile the situation.

A Biblical example of this is seen in Paul’s commendation of Onesimus, the runaway slave, to Philemon, his master (Philippians v8ff). The Roman law of the time meant that Philemon could have inflicted a severe penalty on Onesimus, but Paul urges him to receive Onesimus back. When he ran away, Onesimus met Paul who told him about the gospel, and he had become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul urges Philemon to welcome Onesimus back. An example of the opposite to peacemaking is found in those who foolishly advised King Rehoboam to make things more difficult for his subjects (1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10). The result was that instead of there being a reconciliation, the kingdom of Israel split into two, and there was permanent hostility between these two groups.

2) Their blessedness

Jesus said, *“... for they will be called sons of God.”*

Peacemakers are those who belong to the household of faith, the family of believers. They have been adopted into God’s family (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 3:4-7). This is a staggering blessing, but God in his grace transforms into his sons those who, in full knowledge of their wretched

sinfulness, turn to God in repentance and place their faith in Christ! Sons of the living God!

They already display the family likeness as peacemakers, for God in Christ has made peace with them (2 Corinthians 5:17ff):

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled. God has made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

In the great matter of reconciling sinners to God, it is God who has made the first move, not those who have offended him. It was God who provided the means of reconciliation through the death and resurrection of Christ, not those who had offended him. Therefore, peacemakers already display this family likeness. They share in the Father’s own activity, and are labourers together with God.

Therefore, as sons of God, they now enjoy the family privileges. They are precious to God who loves them (Malachi 3:17-18). They have fellowship with God who delights in them (1 John 1:3). They have security in God who protects them continually (Romans 8:38-39). They

have contentment through God who provides for them (Philippians 4:16-17). They have an inheritance from God assured to them (Romans.8:16-17; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

Chapter 9 Matthew 5:10-12 “Blessed are those who are persecuted”

Introduction

We have seen throughout these studies on the ‘Beatitudes’ that Jesus’ teaching in these verses is totally different from the natural way of thinking and reasoning. This is because his kingdom is not of this world, and it is a spiritual kingdom which is governed, not by man’s ideas, but by God. As the man of the world looks at these characteristics which Jesus has outlined, he considers them foolish. Indeed they are the very opposite to his way of thinking. ‘Blessedness’ or ‘happiness’, he reasons, does not come from being poor, or mournful, and meek and pure, and certainly not from being persecuted. The unbeliever thinks like this because he is without the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14): *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* Being without the Spirit means the unbeliever is spiritually lifeless and dead (Ephesians 2:1). His thinking is governed by this world’s sinful standards, and not by heaven’s righteousness. He is in the dark, whereas the Christian believer is in the light.

The person that Jesus describes in the ‘Beatitudes’ is totally different from the ordinary man of the world. God’s

grace has transformed him. Consider how this is explained in the following Bible verses. Colossians 1:13-14:

“For he (i.e. God the Father) has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

2 Corinthians 4:6: *“For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, made his light to shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*

1 Peter 2:9: *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

This difference between the Christian believer and the unbeliever is seen remarkably in this present ‘Beatitude’. Jesus said in Matthew 5:10ff,

“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.”

1) The nature and cause of this persecution

We need to note very carefully that Jesus spoke about those who were *“... persecuted because of righteousness...”* and that is a very specific reason.

a. What it does not mean

- (i) This is not persecution that has arisen because of a difference of political views. There are lots of countries where some citizens are considered as political dissidents and endure hardships because of their views. This is not what Jesus was referring to in this 'Beatitude'.
- (ii) This is not persecution because of racial intolerance. One of the tragedies of the world we live in is the abuse that many have to suffer because of their cultural or ethnic background or their language or even the colour of their skin. All such cases are tragic and wrong, but it is not this kind of persecution that Jesus spoke about in this 'Beatitude'.
- (iii) This is not persecution which has come because the person suffering has been deliberately offensive and ill-mannered. This is something that can quite easily happen when Christian believers are careless in the way they share the good news about the Lord Jesus with others! We know that there is an offence which the gospel itself produces as it exposes men's sins and declares God's radical remedy for sin. Paul called it the offence of the cross (Galatians 5:11). But that in no way gives us an excuse to deliver that message in an offensive way. We must never live before and speak to others about the Lord Jesus as if we were better than them because we are Christians. That is to be guilty of pride and to behave like the self-righteous Pharisees whom Jesus repeatedly condemned! This does not mean the Christian will never speak to others about the

truth of their sinfulness, but they will "*speak the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15).

- (iv) This is not persecution that has arisen because of some wrong that we have done (1 Peter 4:15): "*If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*"

b. What it does mean

This is persecution resulting from doing what is right. Persecution resulting from living a holy life. Persecution because of seeking to please God by living in accord with the teaching and instructions of the Bible. Persecution for doing good. Persecution for proclaiming the gospel, which calls men to turn from their sin to God in repentance, and to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is persecution that arises from being a follower of the Lord Jesus and living the Christian life.

There are numerous examples of this in the Bible. A summary is given in Hebrews 11:35-38:

"Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might obtain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, ill-treated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."

In the Old Testament we have a number who suffered in this way. Godly Abel was murdered by his brother Cain because God had accepted his offering (Genesis 4). Elijah the prophet was hated by Queen Jezebel because he was a godly man who opposed sin (1 Kings 19:2). Jeremiah was threatened with death for faithfully declaring God's message to the people (Jeremiah 26:8). Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were thrown into the fiery furnace because they only worshipped God and therefore refused to bow down and worship the image Nebuchadnezzar had set up (Daniel 4). Daniel himself was thrown into the lions' den because he prayed to God (Daniel 6).

The New Testament also has many examples of those who suffered for righteousness. John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded because he boldly told Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife (Matthew 14:1-12). The Apostles were beaten and imprisoned for preaching about Jesus (Acts 4:1ff, 5:17ff). Stephen was stoned to death for his godly life and words (Acts 6 & 7). The church at Jerusalem was scattered because of persecution (Acts 8:1-3). Paul suffered intense persecution including being abused at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45), stoned at Lystra (Acts 13:19-20), imprisoned and flogged at Philippi (Acts 16:16f), and arrested and sent to Rome (Acts 21:17ff). (See also 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.)

In every case, those listed above in both the Old and New Testaments, were persecuted because of being godly, not for doing wrong. Indeed, we are told specifically that those

who seek to be like Christ will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12):

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

And we are also called to this as Christian believers (Philippians 1:29):

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him...”

The supreme example of all is the Lord Jesus himself. He went about doing good, neither was there any deceit in his mouth; he was tempted in all points like us but was without sin; he spoke most graciously and acted most kindly, but he was hounded throughout his life and ministry until he was crucified. (See 1 Peter 3:19-23, 3:17-18, 4:12-19.)

c. Why believers are persecuted for righteousness

The reason for this is the sinful heart of man, and behind man stands Satan, the great enemy of God and his children (see 1 Peter 5:8-9). The person without the Spirit of God in his heart lives a life that is opposed to God. He is a rebel and hostile to the ways of the Lord (Romans 8:6-8):

“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

Therefore, every time an unbeliever is confronted with a disciple of the Lord Jesus who is living a godly, upright, pure and obedient life, the unbeliever is reminded of his

own sin. This then sets up a hostile reaction within him. The pride of man hates to admit its guilt, that it has done wrong and is wrong. The sinful heart hates to be told it is sinful. Hence, it reacts with hostility when it is confronted with a righteous life.

This is aggravated when the Christian believer begins to share the gospel with sinners, for the gospel exposes their sinfulness again. This is why it is the gospel, it is good news for sinners. Without this reference to sin, it is not the true gospel. And without this exposure of man's rebellion against God, sinners will never see their need of a Saviour. This is why Jesus replied to the religious leaders as he did in Matthew 9:10-12:

“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?’ On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.’”

This exposure of man's sinfulness, which the gospel of Christ brings, is necessary for men to realise their need, so that they will turn to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness. However, because of man's sinfulness, the human heart does not like to hear these solemn, searching, challenging and condemning truths. Sinful man does not want to give up his sinful behaviour, the result being that those who both live righteous lives, and speak of righteousness are often on the receiving end of this hostile reaction. The Bible states that unbelievers will hate those who are

followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Matthew 10:22, 24:9; John 15:19; 1 John 3:12-13.)

3) Why the persecuted are blessed

The Lord Jesus comes right back to where he began in the first ‘Beatitude’ when he described the poor in spirit in the same way, “... *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” They are already in Christ's kingdom. Already they belong to the eternal kingdom of his love and grace. The Lord Jesus Christ is their King. They have come under his sovereign, caring, loving protection. He rules over all things for their good (Ephesians 1:22-23). We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and, therefore, belong to this glorious spiritual realm.

And so in a strange way, what is intended to destroy us actually becomes a source of great consolation. We would not be suffering persecution for righteousness' sake if we were not true believers. This persecution speaks to our own hearts that we are indeed the Lord's. So the very opposition which is intended by our hostile opponents to discourage and depress us, is actually overruled by God to show us that we truly belong to him! It strengthens our assurance that Christ has indeed saved us from our sin and that we are in fact children of God. Such persecution is not an indication that God is displeased with us nor that he has deserted us.

In Matthew 5:12 Jesus added:

“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Jesus assures us that the glory of the kingdom of heaven awaits us. Knowing we have this glorious future enables us to persevere in following the Lord Jesus even under the most hostile conditions.

Conclusion

The high standard that the Lord Jesus Christ places before us in the 'Beatitudes' is very searching, but to belong to his kingdom is the highest of all privileges. Indeed, to be in the kingdom of heaven is more important than anything else in life. If we are not in Christ's kingdom we shall perish.

From these verses we also see that to be a true follower of the Lord Jesus is obviously no easy matter, and his words indicate it is quite costly to be a Christian believer. However, the privileges each of the 'Beatitudes' has presented to us far outweigh any cost that we may entail for being Christ's disciple. The Lord Jesus brings us into his kingdom, comforts us with everlasting comfort, gives us a marvellous inheritance, clothes us in his own righteousness, lavishes his mercy upon us, and will one day bring us before the very throne of God where we shall gaze upon him in uninterrupted glory and blessedness and joy for ever and ever, and even now treats us as sons of God.

To have Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour is not only more important than anything else in life, but it is the greatest privilege we can ever know. The praise is entirely his because all these privileges he obtained for us through his sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross, but the blessings are all ours. How wonderful to be able to say that Jesus is mine and I am his for ever and for ever. Can

you say that? If you are poor in spirit, and mourn over your sin, and are meek, and long for righteousness, and are merciful, and desire to be pure in heart and to be a peacemaker, and even suffer for righteousness, then you can say with assurance that you are Christ's and you belong to him forever.

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