

SERMON ON THE MOUNT #1 – MATTHEW 5: 3-12:

³ **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

There have been many great speeches throughout history. However, there is one speech, one talk, one message that has been hailed as the greatest of them all. Given by the person who lived the greatest life that has ever been lived, The Sermon on the Mount by Jesus. It also had the most famous prayer ever uttered. **“Our Father, in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.”**

When he was done, here was the immediate verdict: **“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” (Matthew 7:28-29.)** Everyone knew that this teaching given by Jesus was special because Jesus spoke with the authority that they all recognised.

I like how Stanley Hauerwas puts it in his theological commentary on Matthew, **The sermon on the mount cannot help become a law, an ethic, if what is taught is abstracted from the teacher.** Accordingly, the sermon is not just addressed to individuals but to the community that Jesus has started through the calling of the disciples.

If we are honest, sometimes the sermon on the mount reads like a list of laws that we just can't live up to. It's not a message that says. “Come on old chap, I guess you will have to try harder to pull yourself up by your bootstraps” If we believe this, then the beauty of the message becomes a terrible burden and leaves us feeling condemned. We must always remember that the sermon does not command people to do this or that to enter the kingdom of God or remain in it. Rather, it describes life in the Kingdom. So, the sermon on the mount is a description of a way of life, of a people, that results from following Jesus.

We see, therefore, that the sermon on the mount is the word of King Jesus to his people and that includes you and me. There is a lot going on in behind this Sermon, specifically to our hearts and

motives. I like how Daniel Doriani in his book on the sermon on the mount puts this, **Jesus does not simply tell us what to do. He invites us to see the world the way he does.**

For example, let's talk for a moment about anger and lust. Jesus knows we are simply not capable of willing ourselves free of anger or lust. He knows we are after all, only human. Rather, Jesus offers us membership in a community in which our bodies are formed in service to God and one another so that our anger and lust are transformed. This is how Stanley Hauerwas puts it, **alone we cannot conceive of an alternative to lust, but Jesus offers us participation in a Kingdom that is so demanding we discover we have better things to do that to concentrate on our lust. If we are a people committed to peace in a world of war, if we are a people committed to faithfulness in a world of distrust, then we will be consumed by a way to live that offers freedom from being dominated by lust.**

So, this morning we will start with Matthew 5: 3-12. You have probably heard the word beatitudes. They're called the beatitudes because each sentence begins with the word "blessed". During much of the Middle Ages, the Bible was only translated into Latin, and the Latin word for "blessed" is "beati" (pronounced Be-at-tee). So, these became known as the beatitudes.

³**"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 5: 3.** Jesus starts off by saying something about happiness that no other major spiritual figure had ever said – that the people in the world who are truly happy are poor in spirit. Where in our world do we ever say that anybody who is poor is considered happy? Or has somehow found happiness? The word "poor" means you're lacking something, needy, living in some kind or type of poverty.

People who are poor in spirit are those who admit that they are spiritually empty. That on their own, apart from God, they have nothing. God can only pour into those who are not too full of themselves. There has to be an internal emptying in our lives before there can be a filling.

Now, this does not mean we need to go around trying to be poor in the spirit. It means we need to be humble when it comes to our Christian life. I like how Michael Wilkins puts it, this **attitude of humility in the harsh realities of life makes a person open to receive the blessings of the Kingdom of heaven.**

⁴**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4.** The second beatitude seems to say that the way to a jubilant heart is through tears. Here Jesus is not just speaking to an individual's mourning, but he also spoke of an individual comforting. So, yes, it's appropriate to use this text when life deals some harsh blows. It is also the promise of comfort to those who sense their sin and mourn for it. Our mourning does not turn to grief without hope. We also mourn the things that God mourns. ³**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,** ⁴**who comforts us in all our troubles, so**

that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4.

⁵ **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5.** This third beatitude must have been received in shocked silence by Christ's listeners. The religious leaders of the day sought happiness through a materialistic and militaristic kingdom. It's not a very attractive word, "meek". In Jesus' day, it referred to power and strength that is under control. It meant a person who had tamed themselves, who knew how to exercise self-control and self-discipline. Think of it like a highly trained fighter who meets a drunk guy in a bar who wants to pick a fight. He could take him, but he doesn't. He walks away. He chooses to be meek.

This beatitude goes on to teach that the meek shall inherit the earth. I like how James Montgomery Boice in his book on the sermon on the mount puts it, **they are those who trust in the Lord, who delight themselves in the Lord, who commit their way unto the Lord, who rest in the Lord. It is these who are happy, according to Jesus and it is these who will inherit the earth.**

⁶ **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matthew 5:6.** Righteousness is one of those lost words that we don't use very much anymore, but it's a shame because it's a great word. Righteousness simply means "rightness" and here, a "rightness" with God. It's the desire to see God's standards, God's values, established in every area of your life. Further, to crave to see the same thing extended throughout all of life and culture.

Without a sense of righteousness, what's guiding you? What is leading you? Without this, there is nothing lifting your vision for your life beyond the most superficial of things. There is nothing bigger than your calling to invest your one and only life into something significant. Jesus says there's only one thing that will feed the hunger and quench the thirst. Right-relatedness with God, and working for right-relatedness in the world, because the hunger and thirst is for him and his rightness.

⁷ **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Matthew 5:7.** Mercy is best defined as compassion for people in need. Not just when they're down and out, but giving them grace and forgiveness in the day-in, day-out activities of life. So, what Jesus is saying is, "Happy are those who do not take advantage of the weakness or vulnerability of another." Those who give grace tend to receive it.

The Apostle Paul wrote, ⁴ **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,** ⁵ **made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.** ⁶ **And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,** ⁷ **in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his**

grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7. As we have experienced mercy from God, we must in turn show mercy to others.

Now with that in mind, let's look at the sixth beatitude Jesus gave us. **⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8.** In the Bible the heart is the centre of our personality. It involves the mind, will, and emotions. However, we are forced to ask; is it possible to have a pure heart? The answer is that only God can do that work with us. King David knew this and prayed, **¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51:10.** I am convinced that God does this practically during our earthly life as we yield to the gentle urging of the Holy Spirit.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9. A peacemaker is someone who does just that - makes peace, not someone who just avoids conflict. In fact, avoiding conflict can often make things worse. Peacemaking isn't conflict avoidance; it's actively working for peace. Jesus says that the person who works to resolve conflict, restore relationships, build bridges, is living a life that is to be envied. The person who has a healing word rather than a divisive one; the person who brings calm when there is a storm; the person who soothes rather than enflames. That's happiness.

Jesus said that peacemakers will be called "sons" (or "daughters") of God. That's a strange language to us but think about what he's saying. He's saying that our actions reflect our origins, our beginnings, our roots, and our heritage. God is a peacemaker. If you are a peacemaker, you will be marked as someone who is related to God.

Well, the eighth and final mark of a life that Jesus said was truly one marked by happiness may be the most provocative of all. **¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 10-12.**

Jesus was under no illusions about the difference between a life of superficial happiness and true happiness. He prepares his disciples for the time when persecution would indeed come to them, offering them hope that no matter how hard the circumstances they are truly heirs of the Kingdom and so are we.