

Beatitudes

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[0 : 00] Now, can we return this morning for a little while to Matthew chapter 5, Matthew chapter 5, and a very famous section of the Beatitudes this morning.

Can I just say this is not... by... as just as we begin, it's not a blueprint for how we live our lives and something that we need to try and live up to, okay?

These are not instructions for... if we tick each of them off, then we're gonna... we're gonna make God happy and He's gonna give us entry into heaven.

This night... because blessedness... blessedness is just really another word for happiness. I'll explain a little bit more about that in a minute. But these would be nine steps to happiness.

There are nine steps to happiness nightmare. This is not what you would look for in steps to happiness ordinarily. They're different from anything we would expect.

[0 : 58] They're pronouncements of God's favour that flow from a life of faith, okay? They are the fruit, they reflect the fruit of our lives when we've put our trust in Jesus Christ and all that follows on from being His disciples.

That's what this section is about. And I realise today, we're only gonna be skimming the surface and I know that'll disappoint many of you, we could spend a long time on this. But my prayer is that you'll be provoked into a deeper understanding or a deeper interest to understand more and revisit these attitudes in your life.

Because of the amazing... Jesus' amazing description of the character of a Christian and the contented and deep-seated happiness, blessedness that is associated with it.

And that's a great challenge for us this morning. We should be challenged by that. I certainly am challenged by that because so often in our Christian lives we are patently unhappy and accusative of God so often when we aren't happy the way we expect to be happy in our lives.

So if I was to do a survey or if we did a survey among people of where their happy place is, or the pursuit of happiness that is the pursuit of all of us to one degree and another, that is it that makes us happy.

[2 : 25] What would the list consist of? It would consist of, I think there might be differences, but I think there'd be a commonality among it as well, you know, fulfilling love, a comfortable amount of money, enough money to buy the kind of possessions we want, a degree of control in our lives to be strong and healthy, satisfied in the workplace, good holidays, to be treated well, to stay out of trouble yet to have a degree of influence and power so that we don't feel our life's a waste of time, not to be abused or vilified or hated.

These would be some of the things, wouldn't they, if we had a list of what makes our lives happy and these are good things. Stuffing wrong with these things are good desires. There's a lot of common ground between this and what Jesus is saying at one level anyway.

But as Christians, I think what sometimes we do is that when we believe in God and we trust in God, we think that is what God is going to give us, that list of what will make humanity, what will make the person happy.

And when we don't get that, we question Him and we question His love and His commitment to us and we turn away from Him. If we don't get that list of happiness qualifications, that is so common to humanity.

So Jesus' great sermon speaks into that and the Beatitudes speak into that. It's a magnificent sermon. It's the greatest sermon that was ever preached and therefore it's very frightening to try and unpack it and to preach from it in many ways because you feel you're lessening its power somehow.

[4 : 14] It's almost so precious and holy. But yet we know He's given us His Word to consider and be taught from and learn from ourselves. We're probably going to use nine sermons to unpack the sermon in the mount which says a lot about our lack of sharpness and incisiveness besides Jesus.

And He preached this, we're told in verses 1 and 2 that Jesus preached this to His disciples. His disciples came to Him and He was preaching to them. But as we see as we go through it, so it's clearly it's for followers of Jesus, this sermon in the mount, those who put their trust in Him.

But as He does preach it, we read and we find that a great crowd come round and listen as well and they hear what Jesus is saying to His disciples. And that's really, I think that's significant because every good sermon in my understanding should challenge both Christians, should be focused and move towards Christians but should also challenge unbelievers and should be interesting to them and should attract them.

And I hope you're never embarrassed to bring people to church because you think, oh I don't want them to come to church because they'll hear a really boring long dull sermon that will have no significance or impact or relevance to their lives.

If that's what you think about the preaching, take me aside and shoot me or get someone else in who's better at doing it. That oughtn't to be what preaching is for us.

[5 : 46] It certainly shouldn't be dull for us and it should never be irrelevant or beyond understanding at least from an intellectual point of view and a mind point of view for anyone who comes to hear it, they may not agree but we want them to be challenged under the sound of God's Word.

So Jesus, what is He saying? What is He saying in these beatitudes that we have in front of us here? I think the first thing that Jesus is saying is, I offer you everything you've ever desired.

I'm offering you everything you've ever desired. And the words blessed are used nine times and we always know that when He repeats Himself it's very significant.

Now just a little bit of English grammar here, I think that blessing here is more of a verb and in fact it's more of what happens to us. It's what is pronounced on us by God.

Whereas when we use happiness, we tend to use it more as an adjective. It describes how we feel. I'm happy because, and so it's more of an adjective.

[6 : 52] And I think the two in a sense come together, it's both expressing how we feel but it's also what's done to us. There's a clear overlap and a clear fusion in a sense between the two.

So the blessing that Jesus speaks about here, it's more than just happiness but it's certainly not less than happiness. But it's more. It has multiple dimensions.

In God the Son, who we spoke about last week, who was the one who was the light and was dawning on the people in deep darkness, He is unveiling His light.

He's unveiling His truth because light is another word biblically for truth. And He's saying this is the truth. He's declaring the truth. The light has come into the darkness and He's come with His controversial truth.

And He's saying, you know, He's not saying, hey, listen to this sermon, this is a nice way to live, you can try this or try that. Might not work for you but it might be good. He is a declarative word and He's declaring His truth that He is the only way and He is the only truth and recognizing that He shines light on truth.

[8 : 14] And this blessing that He speaks about in these Beatitudes are that profound joy, that fruit and beauty of being whole, being right with God through Jesus Christ.

It's recognizing that there's been an ignition of spiritual life in us, not just physical life that we all have, but when we've come back to Jesus Christ, the physical and the spiritual have come together and we become spiritually alive.

What is before spiritually we're dead if we're outside of Christ because of our sin. And it's a reminder that we're body and soul and that the two come together and bring contentment and happiness.

It's image bearers of God being reconciled to the one in whose image we are made. What is He saying? What are the marks of that? What are the marks of being a believer of being a Christian?

And He speaks about them here in this Beatitude. It's the blessing of rescue. And He's saying that this is what I gift you.

[9 : 21] It's not what we can earn or accomplish or try and do to make us right with God, but He's saying all that you've ever wanted, I'd give you in Christ.

A home, a security of life, a safe and a beautiful earth, experience of heaven, belonging, comfort.

In other words, someone's always there for you. Satisfaction, body and soul, acceptance and love, purpose and meaning in life, a guaranteed future that gets better and better.

Notice what these Beatitudes are promising. There's is the kingdom of heaven. They shall be comforted. They shall inherit the earth. They shall be satisfied.

They shall receive mercy. They shall see God. They shall be called sons of God. They shall be rewarded. There will be great joy and gladness.

[10 : 24] So He's offering here everything that you've ever wanted, but it is a subversive gift. And we see that as we unpack it.

It's a subversive gift. It's not getting everything we've wanted the way we think we should get that, or simply materially without reference to God.

It's a subversive gift. And one of the great problems of sin in our lives is that sin blinds us and we spend our existence away from Christ looking for these amazing realities in the wrong places, because we're facing the wrong way.

And when we search and look for meaning and experience and comfort and hope and all these things away from God, we will always be dissatisfied. We will always be let down, that's the curse of sin and rebellion that ends in death, because we're blind to God.

And we need Him to come into our lives and turn everything upside down. So these pursuits that we all have will be turned upside down by the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 34] And this is the explanation of it. This is a description of Christian character, the reality of having given our hearts to Christ and what it looks like for us.

It turns our idea of happiness on its head. So you can never say, and I know I'm always saying this from the pulpit here, but as Christians we can never say that being a Christian is to be a conformist, is to be a traditionalist, conventional, regular or square.

It's none of these things. If that is what we think Christianity is, then we are barking up the wrong tree. If we think Christianity is the contentment of one hour's worship with God's people on a Sunday morning, we're way off.

For example, can I give you a really bad example? But it's because it's very difficult to get paralleled examples. But can you imagine in terms of wanting and looking for everything, the happiness you want, and maybe you would find that in an absolute dream home, 10 million pounds to buy this home.

And that's what you're aiming for, that's what you're looking for, and you're determined, that's what I'll get, that's what I'll get in life. But you're putting aside one pence every day to be able to afford that house.

[13 : 01] One pence every day is 10 million pounds house. You will never get that house. You will never reach the contentment and the happiness of wanting and living in that house by giving one pence every day.

You need a gift from a billionaire to write the check to enable you to live in that house. Now I know that's a...and you're all sitting...I know you're all sitting there thinking, ah, but that doesn't reflect the gospel and there's a mistake here now.

But can you get the idea that, you know, our very best efforts at happiness, our very best efforts at achieving what we're looking for in our own strength is like putting one pence towards a 10 million...10 million pounds debt.

We...it's...we can't do it. And yet God is saying, you will find happiness when you accept my gift of salvation and recognize who I am.

So we see in this passage in this chapter, nine different areas that are all part of the same picture of the Christian.

[14 : 09] It's not that you can say, well, I'm not so bad in one. I don't think I've got number four. We might have them all, but we have them all as Christians, but to greater, maybe, or lesser degrees.

But let's...I'm very quickly just going to pick out one thing from each of these beatitudes, each of these blessings, which paint the picture of the kind of people we should be as Christians, the kind of character that God is molding in us and changing us to become like day to day.

So the Christian is someone who blessed the poor in spirit for their...and if you think about them, they're extremely counter-cultural. Nobody would write into the newspaper and say, this is...there are nine steps to happiness.

These are the nine characteristics that will make you really happy. You won't find that in the Daily Mail. You'll not find it in any of the media outlets because it is utterly counter-cultural for us to consider them in our lives.

But the first one is a...is the recognition as Christians of our spiritual poverty without Him. It's being poor in spirit. It's not saying there's any intrinsic value in material poverty.

[15 : 22] It's talking about being poor in spirit. It's talking about a spiritual deficit. That spiritual bankruptcy which moves us from being self-reliant and saying, I know better than God and recognizes that we need Him to give us spiritual life.

We need His grace and we need His goodness. Then as we come to Him, we find that He gifts us life and life to the fool.

So the first mark of the Christian is a humble dependence on the living God and a recognition of the poverty of our own ability either to find happiness in our own strength or to earn happiness with our own goodness.

And one day that happiness will be beyond our wildest imaginations. But the second thing, blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted, relay.

Well, happiness avoids mourning, surely. Happiness avoids grief and all the sadness of grief. That's an absolutely paradoxical statement.

[16 : 25] Happy or blessed are those who mourn. But Jesus is saying that as believers we own sorrow. We have own sorrow.

We recognize as we get up this morning we live in a broken world. A world of deep sorrow and deep sadness and deep loss often. We're competing desires and we see the injustice of some people's pursuit of happiness only coming through standing all over other people and bringing sadness into their experience.

We see the inequality of this world and we see the injustice and we see the sadness of what is happening. But above all we also see our own selfishness and sin and pride and rejection of God's gifts and goodness and God's truth.

And we confess that in our mourning and experience all embracing forgiveness and love through the cross which we will be remembering shortly.

But happiness also are the meek for they will inherit the earth. It's not weakness that's spoken of here as a Christian characteristic, but it is the recognition that we don't demand autonomy.

[17 : 51] It's a meekness which simply means that we recognize there's someone bigger and stronger and more important than us. And as Christians we are bought with a price and therein is true freedom for us.

And with the Holy Spirit in our lives there is a gentle steeliness and an empowerment. The word, and I've used this before here also, the word meek comes from breaking a horse.

So breaking a horse so that it becomes the rider and the horse together become a powerful unit. And it becomes a servant of the rider and yet they become a team and there's a trust between them and a bond.

And that's the word, it's controlled strength. That's what meekness is. And we recognize that our strength comes from relying independent on the living God and the meekness that is involved in that.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled. It's knowing and experiencing that satisfaction is more than a steak, meal and a pint of beer.

[18 : 59] In other words, it's more than simply bodily nourishment and satisfaction and sexual satisfaction and pleasure and all the good things that come from that. It's recognizing soul satisfaction, right, hungering and thirsting after God's righteousness, a deeper and more fulfilling pursuit in our lives.

Not saying that these other things are not appetites we deal with. But it's coming too long for what Jesus offers that material life on its own cannot provide.

That peace with God and that pursuit of knowing His beautiful character transforming and molding us in our experience.

Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. That is the Christian luxuriates in mercy.

That is our first language. It means that we are learning by grace to treat others with the generosity of love and forgiveness and the second chance that we've received and that we know about and that we have.

[20 : 12] It means stepping into their shoes and seeing their faces and being amazed by how they experience grace and forgiveness from us and seeing that that is a picture of what God looks at when He sees our faces, when we understand grace and forgiveness.

It's the opposite of living in this world which is often in our hearts too marked by a desire for revenge or being judgmental or mean-spirited.

It's that, what is it, it's the spiral upwards as opposed to the spiral downwards. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

It's knowing who would ever claim it be pure in heart. It's knowing that we are pure in heart not because of our purity but because we are covered in the purity and righteousness of what Jesus has done and we recognize and know that our joy comes from dealing with that and our happiness comes not being away from God but allowing God to take His rightful place in our heart.

So it's the release, so purity there can mean clean but I think it also is the element of not being divided pure.

[21 : 38] In other words, you know, can't think of the word, but not just not being divided, that will need to do, okay?

Something that's absolutely pure in the words we don't have, we're not got a foot in both camps in the privacy of our heart. There's a single-mindedness, the tyranny of a divided heart where in secret we actually, we're annoyed and angry with God and we don't really love Him and we prefer the things that He hates but we keep that quiet and we try and live this outward self-righteous life.

But as we understand Him and as we understand the blessings that He gives us and the grace, we see God more clearly and we're looking for that in our lives.

Blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God. As Christians we are people who have accepted our spiritual calling and that calling is not to live at peace with everyone at all costs and just remain silent and quiet where there is no peace, but it's recognizing that we have the privilege and the gift of being peacemakers by offering the gospel of reconciliation and gentleness and in respect but with courage to others who are facing the wrong way in the way that we have been facing the wrong way until we come to Christ.

So that's a great thing, isn't it? We feel insignificant in terms of world events and what's happening but we do have the message that enables us to be peacemakers.

[23 : 30] We can offer to every living soul this great good news of the gospel that Jesus Christ offers a gift beyond all gifts. We want people to come home with us.

We want people to come home to Jesus Christ with us and experience what we've experienced. And then lastly that kind of double blessed and most unexpected and unwelcome and unwanted characteristic.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you and many others, revile you and persecute you after all kinds of evil against you falsely and rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

So the Christian recognizes and faces up to the reality of a spiritual battle that is in the world in which we live.

There will be opposition and there will be insults directed towards us.

[24 : 39] Now do remember it says it's for righteousness sake and on Jesus' account he says, you know it's to be ridiculed and reviled for being an idiot, for being a big mouth, for being self-righteous or judgmental or for words of hate.

That is not what's being, what's not, that's not what's meant here but it's recognizing that when we follow Jesus Christ we're going the opposite way to the world and what we have is seditious truth, it's seditious truth.

And just as we are opposed to it in our sinful nature so the world is opposed to Jesus saying that He is Lord. There's only one exclusive way to life and to blessing and to happiness ultimately and it comes through Him.

And that's particularly difficult for us I think but we do it because it's valuable and it's truth. You know if it doesn't really matter then we would never stand up for it and we would never stand against unbelief but because it's so precious and because it's true we're willing to be opposed for it but to be opposed in an equally radical way to the way the world thinks about opposition.

We are opposed to it by loving our enemies. Jesus goes on to say that in the next chapter that that's how we stand up even when we're persecuted, even when we are misunderstood, even when we, people utter all kinds of evil against us falsely.

[26 : 24] We don't seek revenge, we don't seek their harm, we seek their salvation, we seek their grace. We say to them, I would be willing to die for you.

And I love the reality that God gives you to say what you say but it doesn't mean that we accept or that we go along with denying the truth and denying Jesus Christ.

Everyone we face, even our bitterest enemies, our precious image bearers of the living God like us all broken and abused.

But the story that we have cannot be denied even if it means rejection and hatred. And why can we rejoice and be glad? Because well, they did that to Jesus and He was completely innocent.

In fact, they took Him all the way to the cross. And we recognize therefore that there is this spiritual battle. If there's no persecution or no battle in our lives, what is it that we are standing up for before Him?

[27 : 37] But we know the truth will prevail and the heaven is our home and we are called to love Him to the end. And for that we're very grateful.

And the challenge is for us both to recognize this pursuit of happiness through following Jesus Christ's counter-cultural life that is His gift.

As a council of despair, if you're going to try and earn this, it's a gift. It's been given eyes to see. It's walking in a different way. And it's seeing true shalom, true happiness and contentment in Him.

And recognizing that these are characteristics that will flow from that. And maybe if you're not a Christian this morning for you to reconsider what Jesus says about what it means to be a Christian and not just to be content with maybe a cultural idea or your own idea of what it means to be a Christian, but recognize that there is a great cost because it is counter-cultural and it's turning a different way.

But the provision that He gives is for all that you're ever looking for, all that you're ever looking for in Him that you will never find outside of Him. And that's the great truth and reality that we always seek to come to terms to in our lives.

[29 : 07] So let's pray and now celebrate the Lord's Supper together and I'll explain a little bit about that as we do. Father God, we ask that you'd help us to understand a little bit more about your blessing, what it means to be blessed, to be accepted, to be forgiven, to have this amazing divine love poured out into our lives.

It doesn't look like that. It doesn't seem like that from these beatitudes in natural terms. But give us eyes to see and give us a deep understanding of repentance which is turning round to follow you and what that means.

We pray for it for ourselves more clearly, pray for it for our friends, pray that we would rejoice in being free to be peacemakers, not just to hide and be silent in order to keep peace where there is no peace.

And we pray that Jesus would have the honour, the praise and the glory in our lives and as we think on Him through the Lord's Supper. Ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.