

Who is Blessed? (Part 2)

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[0 : 0 0] Corrie last week took us through to verse 6 and we're going to kind of set the scene again briefly and look at the rest of the Beatitudes briefly this evening also. Obviously it's just a brief skim through these great words of Jesus and it's really in a sense it's kind of like the Sermon in the Mount is really like Jesus taking us around the table and is giving us a serious chat about what it is to be a Christian. That's what he's doing in the Gospel ministry and message that he gives us here in the Sermon in the Mount and very often he does that and we need to know that because we have sin blinds. Can someone who's on door duty, could someone maybe go to the door to let someone out? Yeah, thanks. We have, you know, it's that recognition of privilege and who we are. I can imagine at some point that Prince William and his wife will have little George around the table and say listen pal, well they probably won't say that actually. They'll say listen young man, you're a prince and along with being a prince there's certain responsibilities and he'll have that table talk with him and I've no doubt at a different table over this last fortnight the shadow cabinet table there's probably been people who have been asked to consider their behaviour or their thinking and recognise the new responsibilities they now have as members of the shadow cabinet along with privilege always goes responsibility and that's no different for us as Christians. We have great privileges but we also have great responsibilities and the Beatitudes are fundamental to teach, indeed the Sermon and the Mount is fundamental to teaching us that Jesus says to us Luke you are image bearers, you're my children, you belong to me and as image bearers these are the characteristics that I want you to bear. Now this isn't anything about personality, we've all got unique personalities, we're all different in our personality and we thank God for that but this is about our

Christian character and these are characteristics that we are to share in being Christ-like as we are people moulded by grace living under the shadow of the cross through the battles of life we are Christians who are to become moulded into the character set that is summarised in the Sermon and the Mount, the rest of the Sermon goes on to unpack that in different ways but the Beatitudes give us the general characteristics that we share as believers and I would like to stress in this series the cost of discipleship, the cost of grace, grace is free but it isn't cheap and so there's a cost to being a Christian and we all have a responsibility to be transformed by grace. We're not to stay the same, it's no badge of honour to say 30 years down the line well I haven't moved in my Christian life, I've remained dogged and I've remained the same and I'm the same now as I was then, that's no badge of honour, that's a testimony of great shame if we haven't developed and matured and been transformed in our character to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ, to shun evil and sin as we've seen in the life of Job and as Cori reminded us last week the Beatitudes speak of God's good life and the Christian life for us is never the easiest and you'll maybe be coming here today bruised and battered a little bit by the Christian life, it's not the easiest life but it definitely is the life and it is the best life and the Beatitudes sum up that for us. Can I just speak for a few moments in general terms about these Beatitudes and then specifically about the last three that we're looking at today, just very briefly.

The Beatitudes are called that because they infer this great blessing on each of the verses as blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn and so on. What does blessed mean? Well I wonder, it would be interesting to do a kind of straw poll here and to work out from each of you what different emphasis you might give to the word blessed and what it means. I think primarily it's a self-contained joy, that's what blessing is, it's not something that is circumstantial. In other words blessing is not simply a condition of how we feel, it is who we are. It's not just how we feel, it's who we are. I think we often associate blessing with good circumstances and that being a reflection of God's favour in our lives. Hashtag blessed, okay? That's what we are maybe and that's what we feel for.

A good day, we've been out in the sun, we've had a picnic, everyone's great, we've gone home, hashtag blessed. That's how we feel and we feel that that is our blessing and it's good to feel blessed like that and it's good to be thankful to God for his gifts but that's a tremendously one-dimensional perspective on blessing and its weakness is that very often it reflects an attitude that is dependent on circumstances, our blessedness is dependent on our circumstances on externals and on our feelings. Therefore it's very volatile so there's many days we'll not say hashtag blessed because that's far from what we feel because we feel far from God or we don't feel under his blessing and yet the Beatitudes are speaking to us about the characteristics that belong to the Christian that allow us to claim blessedness, that we are blessed. What we are in Christ is that we are blessed. We are blessed always in Christ, not dependent on our circumstances, not dependent on our feelings but when we have come to Christ we are in a place where we can know and understand and have that self-contained joy and life that comes from being made right with God through Jesus Christ our Lord and

Savior so that we can rise each day whatever we are facing in the day and we can know that we are blessed in our lives. Now I realise that probably from this pulpit I stress the battles of life more, maybe even more than I should, that the struggles and the difficulties and the doubts and the fears and yet it's important for us to have the other side of that and recognise that even in darkness or in struggles that we are a people who are blessed. We should be able as Christians and as believers this evening to rejoice and give thanks despite even maybe the circumstances we find ourselves in because we have an identity in Jesus Christ which will not be taken from us, which means that we know the stability of His friendship, of His grace, of His life, of His favour over us because of Jesus Christ our Lord. That gives for us a great stability. I think it's easy for us to mourn and grumble and complain and find many reasons to criticise and condemn the way God is dealing with us in our lives and yet we have this perspective that must be one that we reflect, one that we rejoice in and one that we share both in our worship together in our lives that we are blessed. So blessing is not so much how we feel it is who we are in Jesus Christ and the Beatitudes speak of blessing and they also speak therefore in general terms of shared characteristics. The Beatitudes are not unlike the fruit of the Spirit. We oughtn't to talk about the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, gentleness, self-control as if they are individual fruit that we can pick and choose about. It's more like a cluster of grapes, one cluster of grapes that is to be reflected in our lives all of the fruit of the Spirit, maybe to a greater or lesser degree certainly as we mature in Christ. But we're not to pick and choose the fruit of the Spirit nor are we to pick and choose the characteristics of the Beatitudes. It's not that some of us might be particularly mournful and others might be particularly merciful in their lives and one person mourns the other person is merciful and the odd person now and again is persecuted but that's certainly not for me and I'm not sure about being poor in the Spirit. It's not that we pick and choose different Beatitudes for our lives like personality traits. These all reflect the character that Christ wants us to be. He wants us to have all of these characteristics.

[10 : 34] It's not a mixing and matching to suit our temperament in some kind of consumerist way. We recognise, as Corrie so clearly preached and spoke about last week, that the fundamental basic poverty of Spirit, mourning over sin, gentleness and meekness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness and so on should mark every believer as part of what enables us and makes us blessed in our lives. So there's these shared characteristics and I think the danger for us both in the fruit of the Spirit and in the Beatitudes that are given to us here is that we are consumerist and we forget that sanctification involves transformation.

It involves not just staying as we are and maybe strengthening our strengths and working on our weaknesses at some level. It's more than that. It's being transformed. It's being turned round. It's realising that we are to, in our lives and in our hearts, reflect all of these characteristics and that's what binds us together. Our personalities make us very different but the characteristics that we are to share bind us together and we seek to know and understand that by living a life of sanctification, of transformation and we encourage and teach one another in this. So there's shared characteristics but the Beatitudes in general terms are also paradoxical. You'll not find these Beatitudes in any self-help manual, in any philosophical journal of how to live successfully. The world's values of power, of control, of self-assertion, of ambition and of hedonism are not found in these Beatitudes. They are paradoxical in the sense that they're different from what we would normally expect blessing to be in human terms. So that many people, whether they're believers or many people who are not believers, will say, I feel very blessed today. I'm not quite sure sometimes what that means. I feel very happy. I feel that there's some kind of impersonal warmth hitting my flesh and giving me a good day. But the

Beatitudes are counter-cultural or counter-intuitive at that level because they don't express and they don't speak about happiness and blessedness in the way that the world does.

So often Christians are labelled as being conservative with a small sea, I hope, and certainly not with a big sea, but certainly with a small sea, Christians are labelled as conservative. And really, that shouldn't be the case. Christians are utterly radical and the Beatitudes speak of characteristics that will set you apart from the way that everyone else thinks and acts and lives their lives and makes their decisions because they come from Jesus Christ and it's a mindset that is not the mindset of the unbelieving world in which we live. And that's a challenge to us as we go from here and live our lives.

It's a challenge for us to remember that we're not conservative with a small sea, that we are radical, we are going to be going against the flow, we are swimming against the tide and that will mean challenges for us and it will mean standing up where other people will say nothing and it will mean that we will be living an ethic and a morality that will set us on a collision course with our neighbours and our colleagues and our friends at one level and the way we deal with that is hugely important of course. So it's paradoxical.

[15:07] So the last thing in general terms is that the Beatitudes are both for now, they're for today and they're for later, they're for the future. And I think that's important that we recognise the Beatitudes that Jesus taught, the summary of the characteristics of what it is to be a Christian are for now, the Kingdom of Heaven is now, we belong to Christ, we are citizens of His Kingdom, we belong to a different world, a different mindset, a different Lord over our lives and that is what we believe now. We will be comforted now, we can be satisfied now, we can know mercy now, we will see God spiritually and His work in our lives now, but there's also a future aspect to this Kingdom blessedness and Kingdom beatitudinal thinking and it is that there is still, the best is still to come, that we will inherit the earth and we will know the Kingdom of Heaven in its fullness and in its power and in its glory and that's important for us as Christians to live, not just in the here and now but with this future aspect, with this future dimension in our lives and that also means of course that community, Christian community matters now. The Kingdom of Heaven to which we belong is not all private rooms, there's a communality about it, there's a sense in which we work out our grace for God and our grace from God with one another and that is reflected in the way we live in community as we reflect the body of Christ and as we reflect Christ our Savior and attract others or repel them possibly by that and I know that's very difficult for young people particularly who might be here to think about that future aspect, it's easier the older you get to think of and hope for the future aspect but it's very important that we reflect the Kingdom of God which we will know in its fullness and its perfection one day here in our lives now and that is a challenge, huge challenge for us. So that in general terms as we look at the introductory characteristics, can

I very briefly just mention the last ones that Corey didn't mention specifically the characteristics and so Corey mentioned the early ones and again you know you wonder if people would say blessed, I'm feeling really repentant and humbled by my sin today, hashtag blessed, feeling spiritually poor and grieving over the way I've let others down and let God down, blessed. I feel meek and meekness is a great word, isn't it? It doesn't mean weakness, it is controlled strength, I say that specifically especially to the blokes and the guys here, it's gentle power, it's not weakness, it's not being stood all over, it's controlled strength like Jesus Christ, having that longing and appetite for Christ.

I want to read the Bible, I want to pray and serve God and learn from him, hashtag blessed. So then there's these other characteristics that we have here, blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy and that is an ongoing characteristic that we are asked, you're asked to go tomorrow in your day to day living from here and you're to go and you're to be merciful and you have to work that out, what does that look like for you in your day to day living? How does it look to be merciful? It's the active response of having been dealt with in grace. You know grace is what we receive for pardon and mercy is what we know relieves our need and that's that compassionate attitude that we are to show in our lives, we are to be merciful because as we treat others mercifully that will be, it's kind of one comes after the other, chicken before the egg, whatever you call, you might want to think about it as we are blessed, as we've received blessing, as we've received mercy, we show mercy and as we show mercy we receive mercy and so if we are harsh and judgmental and have a high expectation of others then we'll find that that is how we are judged ourselves and yet and that's not been how we've been judged by Christ. We've been shown mercy and we show mercy in our lives, we show compassion to those who need it. I don't know how that will work out in you. Do you come across anyone in need in your life? Will you tomorrow? Are we surrounded only by you know lovely people, none of whom have any need? I doubt it. I doubt that's the case. It might not be material need, it might not be practical need although I'm sure there's many opportunities to show such things but there will be many opportunities to help people who are in need in your sphere of influence as you have it in your life. I think that these beatitudes remind us of why a shallow Christianity and a shallow Christian community will not reflect the love of Christ because we will not share need and we will not know need and we will not want to know need. Friend in need is a pain in the neck. That is sometimes what our attitude is because we want to live our own life, our own way in our own bubble without the burden of being merciful which we thank God that Jesus didn't think. So there's merciful but then also there's blessed or the pure in heart for they will see God. Now the Sermon and the

Mount speaks variously about moral purity and that's a very significant and important element of the Christian life that we have a pure ethic and that we live morally upright, blameless and upright lives to go back to job again but this isn't primarily about moral purity rather it's about having a pure heart that is free from division, it's free from hypocrisy, it is absolutely clear minded, it is pure in its direction and its thinking, there's no duplicity there. We don't act one way publicly and act another way privately, it's kind of like a run seal heart, it says what it is in the tin. You know what you are publicly as a Christian of what you profess you are in your heart because there's a purity of heart there, it's undistilled your Christian commitment and mine and honesty a genuineness and that again reminds us of our need for Christ Jesus to take our hearts and to keep our hearts from being duplicitous, from being double hearted or double minded or being unstable and not knowing the way forward so there's that kind of single vision, pure vision in our ongoing lives and therefore we move on to the next one which is blessed by the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God both in the community and in the church. The Christian characteristic is to be one of peacemaking as much as it is up to us, we know that New

Testament recognition that there will be times when it is impossible for us to live at peace but as much as it's possible for us we are to be peacemakers and in your own daily life as you go from here that that is a characteristic that you are to show and there to bear and that's a costly one for us because it's not a peaceman, you know reflecting that in your marriages and in the closest of relationships you have that it's not about appeasing behaviour in order to keep the peace at all costs, it's the same peace that Christ demands if we are to be peace with him which is not a peaceman which is not that Jesus just says well it's okay it doesn't matter you can live any way you like I'll forgive you anyway because that's what I want to do, no there was this great cost to the peace that Jesus Christ can offer the cost of his own blood and it wasn't a peaceman it was absolutely just and it was absolutely loving what he did in the cross and so similarly that attitude of peacemaking is what we are to show in our Christian conduct and in our lives that it's not a peaceman it's not saying you know and very often we are people who don't want any kind of confrontation we don't want any kind of conflict in our lives but to know peace in community and to know peace in your marriage and to know peace at home and to know peace in the workplace will sometimes require that we stand up and say this is wrong what you've done is wrong if there's to be peace there must be repentance and there must be recognition and repentance and a turning from that it's not the piece of the graveyard it's a living vibrant growing and developing piece not touchy feely Christianity it's courageous it's manly it's womanly to live in this way where we deal with one another and when we deal with our sins and our failings and our faults where we say I'm sorry I was wrong you pointed that out that was wrong I'm sorry we move on and we deal with it is not a peaceman that requires for his commitment and it requires depth of relationships something we seek to model here not just a shallow consumerist

[25 : 50] Christianity but one that is committed and that is deep seated and that is wholehearted and lastly and very briefly there is this double beatitude double aspect to this beatitude blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are you when others reveal you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely in my account rejoice and be glad for your reward is in great in heaven so they persecuted the prophets who were before you paradoxical isn't it that this comes after peace there's both peace but there's also persecution in the Christian life and I think it's important for us to remind ourselves of this characteristic because most of us spend our lives and I certainly include myself in this is avoiding at all costs any kind of conflict or persecution from outside from others but it's there and if we are honest to the characteristics of Christ and if we're dependent on him and we're living for him then we will find that we will be persecuted because we are Christ not because we're obnoxious okay I think some people think that it's okay to be obnoxious and be persecuted as a result and that is honoring to God I don't think that's the case I think we are to seek favor of men we are to seek to bless them to love them to serve them but we are going in such a different direction we are thinking so differently from them and our Lordship is so radically opposite to the mindset of the society in which we live there will be and we have known it and seen it opposition and persecution for our faith irreconcilably different values to the world in which we live I guess sometimes the question is do we at our values that different at our pleasures and our ambitions and our focus and our lives and our relationships and our conversations are they really that different from anyone else and is there a sense in which we are completely under the radar knowing no persecution for standing up for the morality and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ what's her to response to be when we will know this in our lives maybe increasingly in a kind of in the public theater of society that we are entering into these days our response isn't to be retaliation we are not to get our own backs not to be an eye for an eye it's not to be one of sulking in the corner and licking our wounds self pity there is it to be stoic not as it indeed to enjoy persecution I think some people enjoy persecution they seem to and I have never understood that but we are to rejoice in Christ and be glad that we are counted worthy in his name for being like him and for being associated with those who went before us in the Old and in the New Testament and that we can look forward to a future free from such persecution and opposition so we find that in that very brief summary the Christian characteristics that should mark all of our lives that we should have to a greater or lesser degree I'm sure depending on our circumstances our age our time of life and whatever else it is that

but we should reflect this these are the characters this is not personality they're all unique this is the character they want us to be and it comes from having that recognition of our need of Jesus Christ and the poverty of spirit and the mourning over sin and the meekness that comes from following him and the hunger and thirst after riches may we reflect that and may you be challenged in this week into which you're entering as I must be by living a beatitudinal life and showing these characteristics in all that we do let's bow our heads briefly and pray Father God we ask and pray that you would teach us from your word that you would lead us in your truth that we would be guided by the ethic and the morality of the good life that is shown to us here and above all that we would see and know that the this life these characteristics are ours as we hunger and thirst after the righteousness after we hunger and thirst after Jesus Christ himself and as we look and see him as the perfect example of this blessed life and as we seek his humility and his grace and his forgiveness in our lives where we fall short of our own standards let alone of heavens Lord keep us from finding it easy to deal with the speck that is in the eyes of others and ignoring the large plank that is jutting out from our own eye help us never to have that sense of self-righteousness that keeps us from knowing your blessing and may we humbly move forward in grace together as a people and individually in our lives bless this congregation today bless each individual here tonight who goes out into a different working world studying world world at home world in commerce whatever it might be we pray for them pray that you would bless them that you'd be close to them that they would know your presence with them in their lives be with us all in this week into which we've entered and help us to honour you and praise you and be encouraged to support and look after one another in the battles and in the vicissitudes of life that we face so continue with as we pray and guide us as we conclude our worship and sing praise together in Jesus name.

Amen.