

Are you Blessed?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 February 2025

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Well, somebody sneezes and we might say bless you before a meal. Somebody may say let us bless this food. Somebody does something nice and we hear ah bless. Normally it's a child who does something.

Or if you scroll through social media, you may come across the hashtag blessed. And if you look at hashtag blessed, whenever you see it, you will see on Instagram, for example, lots of different ways that people would consider themselves to be blessed.

And so the words bless, blessing and blessed are still used quite often these days. And probably because it's the reason is everybody wants to live a blessed life or to have a blessed life.

And even if they wouldn't use the word blessed, what they mean is they want their life to go well. They want to be happy, fulfilled, satisfied, blessed. They want things to be good for them.

And so the question is, the question of our sermon title this afternoon is, are you blessed? And what does a blessed life look like? Is it personal success, good health, fit body, sound mind, close family, happy marriage, content children, fulfilling job, financial security, close relationships?

[1 : 25] How do you define what it is to be blessed? Because in the eyes of this world, all of this would suggest a happy and a blessed life.

But actually, none of it is listed in Jesus' description of what it means to be blessed that Donald just read for us. Because when Jesus teaches what we call the Sermon on the Mount and he begins with these famous Beatitudes to start it, they are very surprising because they're not normally how people would think that we are blessed.

And the greatest blessings, according to Jesus, aren't found in the places that our world and our culture and our society looks today in order to be happy or to be blessed.

And so when it comes to being truly blessed, Jesus turns everything our culture says on its head. He flips it in the Beatitudes. So what our culture says about what we should be like, what our culture says about what we need, what our culture says would bring us happiness, the Beatitudes of Jesus are countercultural to the way that we normally think.

But more than being countercultural, they're also counterintuitive as well because they're contrary to what our culture expects is the way to a blessed life.

[2 : 55] Because Jesus is proclaiming the only way of life that brings the blessing our hearts desire. And so we're going to think about the Beatitudes this afternoon under three headings.

So who they're for, what they say, and how we live them. The Beatitudes, who are they for, what do they say, and how do we live them. So first of all, who they're for.

Now, obviously, the Beatitudes begin Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And so we see who they're for when we discover who the Sermon on the Mount is for. So we read verse 1 and 2.

Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. So Jesus is directing his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples.

So primarily, this teaching is for those who are already committed to Jesus Christ. To those who are part of the kingdom.

[4 : 01] So the kingdom is already here in Jesus. We see that in Matthew chapter 4 and verse 17. It's here in Jesus, but it is coming in the future in all its fullness.

And so Jesus is teaching his people how to live now as those who belong to his kingdom. As those who submit to his authority as the one true king.

So just look at the Beatitudes if you glance down verse 3 to 12. They're bookended with the same promise of reward. So the first Beatitude says, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And then the last Beatitude, verse 10, it says, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now, this is a way of including everything that is in between. Where Jesus shows us what a transformed life in the kingdom of heaven ought to look like.

Because that is the only way to be truly blessed. And so those who don't bow to Jesus as king and fail to enter into his kingdom will never experience his blessing.

[5 : 14] Whether now in this life or in the future. Because we are either a citizen of the kingdom of heaven or we are a citizen of this world.

Now, citizenship is important, right? You realize that when you go to somewhere like the United States of America. And you're at airport security. And you have to wait for hours and hours and hours.

Whereas all the national citizens just waltz on through within about three seconds. Then you realize, okay, citizenship is an important thing. So, citizenship of the kingdom of heaven is what Jesus is talking about here.

But what then does it mean to be blessed? Well, it means more than to be happy. It doesn't mean any less than being happy.

But it is more than just being happy. It's deeper. It's richer. And it's fuller than mere happiness.

Ultimately, to be blessed is to be approved by God.

[6 : 18] So, it's a life that only exists in relationship with God. Which means it's worth saying that we mustn't misread the Beatitudes or misread the Sermon on the Mount.

Because we can't read Jesus' words here with some kind of naive optimism that makes us think, No problem, Jesus. I can do everything you say.

No sweat. That is one extreme. But there is the other extreme of thinking. As we read this words, we are filled with hopeless despair. Thinking, I could never do that.

I would never manage to do anything that Jesus says here. Well, just remember who the Sermon on the Mount is for. It's for the disciples of Jesus, for those who already belong to the kingdom.

And so, Jesus sets before us the vision for what our lives are to become. His teaching here is meant to shape us and to grow us and to form us into kingdom people.

[7 : 21] Where our hearts and lives are transformed by the values of the kingdom of heaven. And so, by taking in these values in our hearts and living them out in our lives, we become citizens of God's kingdom in this world.

And so, the Beatitudes here basically outline the characteristics of kingdom citizens here in a fallen world. And that's why Jesus starts.

Not by telling us what to do, but by telling his people how truly blessed they are. Because if we're one of Jesus' disciples, then being is the foundation for all doing.

In other words, who you are in Christ will then have an impact on what you do and on how you live your life. Okay, the Beatitudes.

The first point is, that's who they're for. Followers of Jesus. Secondly, what do they say? Well, there are eight Beatitudes. And so, we're just going to go through each of them in turn.

[8 : 30] I did wonder whether we could do one sermon on each Beatitude. And we probably could. But I'm not going to do that today. You'll be glad to hear. So, we'll go briefly through them and look at each one to see what Jesus is saying.

So, verse 3, the first Beatitude. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So, what does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Well, it's got nothing to do with being financially poor or materially poor or even mentally poor. Poor in spirit means to be spiritually poor.

To acknowledge that we basically are spiritually bankrupt before God. We've got nothing to offer God. There's nothing in our spiritual bank account, so to speak.

We're in desperate need. And we're totally dependent upon God. Now, this is in stark contrast to the attitude of our world, isn't it? The world is all about self-reliance and self-confidence.

[9 : 31] It's where it is all about you and about you making something of yourself and of your life. But the poor in spirit, according to Jesus, aren't those who are full of themselves, but rather those who recognize how empty we actually are.

By admitting our spiritual bankruptcy and coming to God with empty hands, knowing that God needs to fill us. I think the prodigal son is one of the best illustrations of this, because he leaves his father full of himself with his inheritance, thinking he will make it in the world.

And it's only when he is bankrupt that he comes to his senses, he realizes his desperate need, so he swallows his pride and he makes his way back home to his father with empty hands.

And it's only when we recognize our great spiritual need and throw ourselves upon God that we experience this blessing of the kingdom of heaven.

And so the first question of application of the first beatitude is, well, how much do you recognize your need of God? How empty do you know that you really are?

[10:50] How empty do you realize that you really are? That's the first beatitude. The second is there in verse 4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

So it's not enough to realize that we're spiritually bankrupt. We also should mourn over our sin.

Because unless we are convinced how offensive our sin is before God, and the way that it spoils and destroys our lives, then we'll never get to the point of mourning over it.

And so if we aren't grieved over our sin, according to Jesus, then we'll never be comforted. I wonder when the last time was that you or I wept over our sin.

When was it that we really felt cut to the heart because of our sin and failure before God? And I don't mean mourning because you were found out over your sin, because there's a difference, isn't there?

But because you were devastated by the sin itself. Our culture prefers to celebrate sin rather than mourn over it.

[12:00] And we can easily get used to living in this kind of atmosphere where sin against the holy God is acceptable or it's not really a big deal.

And so sometimes we can worry less about the sin and more about the damage getting caught will do to us, to our image, to our reputation.

But Jesus' second beatitude here tells us to hate our sin and to take it seriously. Because the reality is that if we try to live with our sin, then we won't feel comforted.

We'll actually feel far worse. It may be great at the start, but soon the guilt will come and it will be short-lived. But the beauty of life in the kingdom is that we do find comfort rather than condemnation when we confess our sin.

And that's a great thing about the good news of Jesus. Whoever we are and whatever we have done, we can find forgiveness. And I'm sure this beatitude goes further and wider than just personal mourning over sin.

[13:10] Because those who belong to the kingdom will, of course, mourn over the devastating consequences of sin in our society and in our world. The consequences of sin on human flourishing.

And I wonder whether we mourn over the rejection of God's kingdom values and the destruction that it causes to our society. Whether it be the unborn child or the pressure to kill those who are nearing the end of life.

The point Jesus is making is there's something wrong in us, in our hearts, in every single one of us. And Jesus wants us to acknowledge this, not just to make us feel bad or to feel guilty, but because it's what leads to the living of a transformed life in the kingdom, in this fallen world.

The third beatitude, verse 5. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. When we hear the word meek, we tend to think it equates with being weak.

But meekness has got nothing to do with weakness. It's not about being a pushover. Meekness is an attitude of humility and submission before God.

[14:31] And so it results in a desire not to push yourself forwards, but to restrain yourself for the sake of others. And so if you're going to pursue the meekness that Jesus speaks about in this third beatitude, then there is no point applying to be a contestant on the traitors or the apprentice.

You might get on, but in order to win, you will not be showing meekness. It's all about your ego. It's about looking better than everybody else.

It's all about making sure that you are the most important at the expense of everybody else, where you have got to big yourself up by saying you're better, you're more faithful, and you're most deserving of the prize.

Being prepared to trample over everyone else so that you can win. And yes, in this world, the self-confident, the proud, and the arrogant are often rewarded with big cash prizes.

But Jesus says it's the meek who will inherit the earth, not those who are full of themselves. Rather, it's those who humble themselves before God who are the real winners.

[15 : 50] Fourth, verse 6, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Now, hunger and thirst are obvious, fundamental human needs that have got to be satisfied. But how much more when Jesus originally spoke these words, because food and water wasn't as easy to come by as it is for us today.

And so his listeners knew the intensity of what it meant to be hungry and what it meant to be thirsty. Which is why Jesus says it's the same with hunger satisfying and thirst quenching.

He says this is the kind of intensity, the desire that you should have when it comes to righteousness. You should want it as much as you want that next meal or satisfying glass of water after your run.

He's saying you need to get it. Righteousness, just as much as you need to get food and drink. And so it's not enough just to recognize our spiritual bankruptcy.

[16 : 58] And it's not enough just to mourn over our sin. But Jesus is saying you must also pursue righteousness. Now, righteousness means being in a right relationship with God.

It's ours in Christ. And so this fourth beatitude is about our desire to live rightly before God. Where we want to live in obedience to God, conforming our lives to his will as we find it in his word.

So it's about living a holy life. One that seeks to fight against sin rather than give in to sin. And so while the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, righteousness also needs to be imparted in us. In other words, there's more work to be done in my life and in your life to make us more righteous, more like what we should be. And so the righteousness in our lives needs to be increasing in every single area.

And the words that come from our lips and what we look at with our eyes and what we do with our bodies. Jesus says a life that pursues righteousness is how you will be filled.

[18 : 19] That is what brings true satisfaction. And that's what Jesus is really promising here.

Because he's saying satisfaction doesn't come by pursuing a life of sin, whatever the sin may be, but by pursuing a life of righteousness.

And then the fifth beatitude, verse seven. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Jesus says if we don't show mercy, then we can't expect to receive mercy from God.

Not that it's a condition, but being merciful is a natural response to having experienced mercy from God for ourselves.

So what is mercy? Well, it's not just to be moved with compassion for somebody in need, but it is to do something for them about their need.

And there's a great illustration of this, of course, in the parable of the Good Samaritan that we looked at last week, where Jesus told of a man who was attacked by robbers and left half dead on the road.

[19 : 27] And the priest comes along, and then the Levite comes along, and we're told they both passed by on the other side. And then the Samaritan comes along, and he has compassion in his heart, and he stops, and he helps the injured man by meeting his needs.

And at great cost to himself. And then Jesus said, who's a neighbor to the man? And then the law expert that Jesus is talking to says the one who had mercy on him.

In other words, it's the Good Samaritan who personifies and exemplifies what it is to be merciful.

And so Jesus says, go and do likewise.

So showing mercy is not an optional extra, according to Jesus. It's what life in the kingdom of heaven should be like.

And so the question for us is, well, are we embodying this mercy in the way that we treat other people? The sixth attitude in verse 8.

[20 : 31] Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Now in the Bible, the heart is a word that basically describes the very center of our being.

Our mind, our will, our emotions. And it's the driving force for every single thing that we do, which makes the heart also the source of all sin.

And since God is holy, then sinners cannot be near him or in his presence. And so being in God's presence requires purity of heart. And so the background to this sixth beatitude is there in Psalm 24, which we said at the start of our service.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart. So to be pure in heart means having an undivided heart.

One that is fully devoted to God. Now, of course, we all fail to do this every single day.
[21 : 43] But the life of the kingdom of heaven is one where our desire for God should become stronger than our desires for all the things of this world that we live in.

Now, we are constantly distracted these days, aren't we? Notifications continually ping on our phone every three seconds. And they draw our desires to all kinds of things that promise to satisfy us and yet ultimately fail.

And so the question is, well, what kinds of things steal the affections of my heart away from the devotion that ought to go to God alone?

My heart should be undivided. But is it just going all over the place to all kinds of things? And how do we know? Well, what is it that I daydream about?

What is it that I love? What do I get distracted by? Whatever it is that will be battling in our hearts against our devotion towards God.

[22 : 52] Now, the seventh beatitude, verse 9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. So as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and children of God, we're called to be peacemakers.

And the good news of Jesus Christ is the greatest peacemaking message this world has ever known. And so we are to help people find peace with God through sharing this peacemaking message.

And they might be in our families. They might be colleagues at work or neighbors. But so many don't have peace with God. But Jesus calls us to be peacemakers.

And this peacemaking characteristic of the kingdom is not just what individual people need, but it's also what our world needs. Because when you look across the history of the world, Christianity has been the greatest peacemaking force the world has ever known.

Because when this was written, when Jesus spoke, the Roman Empire was not about making peace. It was all about war and conquering. And sadly, in our world today, there is very little peace.

[24 : 11] Watch the news. And yes, there are literal wars happening all over the place. But there's so much conflict between so many people over so many different issues. Just spend two minutes on social media and you won't find a peaceful environment where everybody loves each other and has nice, kind, warm, fuzzy things to say.

It's war. Shouting. Taking people down. Criticizing people's opinions. People you've never met. Whilst you sit in your bedroom in your pajamas with your phone in your hand.

But Jesus says that peacemaking is a sign that we really are the children of God. Because we'll be displaying the family likeness.

Now, 8th verse 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So all these other attitudes, sorry, beatitudes, they speak about the character of kingdom people, don't they?

They speak about what we are to pursue. But persecution is different because nobody wants to pursue persecution. And yet Jesus says it is also part of kingdom life.

[25 : 30] Jesus says that persecution will pursue us. We don't need to pursue it. Because if we're determined to follow Jesus in this world and live the kind of life that he sets out here, then, whether it's at work or at home or in our social life or in our relationships, pursuing righteousness is going to highlight and challenge all the unrighteousness that is around us.

Because when you don't do the things that everybody else does or think the same way everybody else thinks or speak the same way that everybody else speaks, then it will get noticed.

And if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you'll realize this in the workplace. And it doesn't just confuse people that you don't fit into the kingdom of this world and you're not a good citizen of the kingdom of this world.

It angers people and it annoys people because they can't stand the fact that somebody is living in a righteous way that shows up their unrighteous ways.

And, of course, for some, the persecution will be different from others. For some, it will be severe and life-threatening. It's not like that for us, but it can still be intimidating.

[26 : 48] It's more likely that people will just simply ignore us. Give us the cold shoulder. Or they'll say, I know you believe that Christian stuff, but just tone it down a bit.

Just calm it. Don't get too excited about it. And yet, it is in the midst of this persecution that Jesus promises the blessings of his kingdom.

So persecution is actually a sign that we're blessed. So those the world curses and rejects, Christians, Jesus calls blessed and a part of his kingdom.

And Jesus says the persecution all comes because of him. Look at verse 11 and 12. 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. So if we follow Jesus, we will experience a level of persecution.

[27 : 56] And yet Jesus tells us we should rejoice and be glad. What? Rejoice and be glad at persecution? How can we be glad if we are suffering for our faith?

Well, Jesus gives the answer because great is your reward in heaven, he says. So he's saying you've got something greater to look forward to.

But there's not simply blessing in the future. Because what Jesus is saying here is that there is also blessing right now. That's why he gives us the Beatitudes. Because they help us experience the blessings of kingdom life right now.

Remember those bookends in verse 3 and verse 10. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And then in between there are six other great blessings. Being comforted in verse 4.

Inheriting the earth in verse 5. Being filled in verse 6. Receiving mercy in verse 7. Seeing God in verse 8. And being called a child of God in verse 9.

[29 : 00] So yes, the kingdom in all its fullness is coming. And it will be the best blessing ever. But Jesus is saying that blessing is for my people now.

To experience it in your life. Because the Beatitudes are saying to us the kingdom of heaven is ours in Christ. And so any persecution that comes is a sure sign that you belong to Jesus.

He is blessing you. You are his. Okay, the Beatitudes. Who they are for. What they say. And then thirdly and finally, how to live them.

Jesus' Beatitudes make radical counter-cultural demands of all of us who are his people. And yet, they promise abundant blessings, don't they?

So we're left asking, well, how is it possible to live this way? The way that Jesus outlines for us.

Because there is such a stark contrast between the kingdom of heaven that Jesus articulates here.

[30 : 09] And the kingdom of this world. Well, Jesus' words confront us. And they challenge us to consider which kingdom defines our lives.

Of these characteristics, how are they coming on in you if you're part of his kingdom? Jesus is forcing us to ask, well, where do we go for happiness?

Where do we go to find blessing? How are we living our lives? Because the world tells us it is found in your strength.

It is found in your success. It is found in your looks. It is found in your self-confidence. But when it comes to the kingdom, Jesus says, no. You will find blessing from a different source.

Archbishop William Temple put it like this. He said, it's no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it.

[31 : 11] I can't. And it's no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it. I can't. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like his.

And if the spirit of Jesus could come and live in me, then I could live a life like his. So the life that Jesus calls us to is a kingdom life characterized by these Beatitudes.

And the only way we'll be able to live it is through the help of his spirit. Because as we read these Beatitudes, what we see is that they are a description of Jesus Christ.

They tell us how blessed we are in him. And what it is like to become like him.

Think about it. Jesus is the only one who was truly poor in spirit. Paul says, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

[32 : 23] Jesus is the only one who truly mourned. Jesus is the only one who was rich. Isaiah says that he was a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Jesus, remember, wept over the death of Lazarus.

And he was full of sorrow for Jerusalem and its people. And then on the cross, Jesus cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

So he experienced God's forsakenness so that our sin can be forgiven and we can be comforted.

Jesus is the only one who was truly meek.

He said, I am meek, gentle, and lowly in heart. Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. And he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Jesus is the only one who was truly righteous. But God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[33 : 32] Jesus is the only one who was truly merciful. He showed mercy to all those people he encountered. You see that when you read the Gospels. But his mercy is supremely displayed at the cross, where he paid the debt for our sin, a debt that we can never afford.

Jesus is the only one who was truly pure in heart. He lived the perfect life in full obedience to God. And he did it for us, so that we can be welcomed into God's presence and see God.

Jesus is the one true peacemaker. He's the son of God, the peacemaker, the prince of peace, making peace between God and human beings through his blood shed on the cross.

Jesus is the one who was persecuted. Even though he had done no wrong, he was insulted, he was persecuted. His enemies said all kinds of evil things falsely against him.

And so the Beatitudes are a beautiful description of the Lord Jesus Christ. And of all that Jesus has done for his people.

[34 : 44] People like you and me. And so they don't tell us what we've got to do to earn our way into the kingdom because we could never do it. Instead, they tell us the blessings of those who belong already to that kingdom.

Because when we're united to Christ by faith, we are blessed in him. And when we realize this, the Beatitudes become what we strive for.

This is a description of how we want to live. Wanting to live this blessed life by God's grace and with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Growing to become more and more and more what Jesus calls us to be. Because we live in the light of the blessings that are ours.

And we display a kingdom life in a fallen world. And so we should notice. But also other people should notice that we are becoming, well, more aware of our spiritual poverty.

[35 : 50] And less self-absorbed as a person. Becoming more distressed by our sin. And less self-righteous, wanting to justify everything that we do.

More humble in our demeanor and less proud. More comforted, more conformed to want to do God's will.

And less self-centered in wanting to do my will. More merciful towards others and less unmerciful towards people. More devoted to God and less to other things.

More peaceable and less divisive in our relationships with others. It should be a course, a life of increasingly becoming aware of just how blessed we are through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so wanting to live in the way that Jesus wants us to live. Because when we trust in Jesus, thankfully we are not what we once were.

[36 : 53] And we are now being conformed to the image of Christ. What we will be. And so may Jesus be our motivation for kingdom living now.

Until the kingdom comes in all its fullness. Let's pray. Let's pray.