

MATTHEW 5:3

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 traditionally begins what has been called the Sermon on the Mount. Although Jesus repeated many of these truths on numerous occasions, chapters 5-7 record for us one continuous message spoken by Jesus on one particular occasion. But I want to start a short series on what is known as the beatitudes, which are recorded for us in Matthew 5:1-12.

As I said we call this section the beatitudes and the name is derived from Latin and refers to a state of happiness or bliss. In this section Jesus presents the possibility of people being genuinely happy. Many people today including some Christian people find that hard to believe. How can a message as demanding and impossible as the Sermon on the Mount be intended to make people happy?

Yet the first and greatest sermon preached by Jesus begins with the resounding and repeated phrase "blessed". But what does that phrase blessed mean?

1. WHAT IS BLESSEDNESS?

The Greek word means "happiness" or "blissful" but the idea behind the word has to do with an inward contentment that is a contentment that is not affected by outward circumstances, therefore happy in the true sense of that word.

Many accuse God of being a killjoy but the truth is that God desires to save people from their tragic state of lost-ness and gives them power to obey his will and as a consequence God desires to make mankind truly happy. God truly desires an inward contentedness and happiness that is unaffected by our own personal circumstances. It is a state of joy and well being that is not dependent upon the physical temporary circumstances of life.

The word "blessedness" is often used of God himself (1 Timothy 1:11 & 6:15). Blessedness is a characteristic of God and it can therefore be a characteristic of men and women who know God as a consequence of conversion they share something of God's nature (2 Peter 1:4).

There can be no blessedness that is no inner contented joy that is not dependent upon outward circumstances without a relationship through faith with the blessed God.

Therefore because blessedness is fundamentally an element of the character of God when people partake of his nature through Jesus Christ they also partake of his blessedness. So it becomes clear right at the beginning of the Sermon of the Mount that Jesus is speaking of a reality that is only for believers.

To be truly blessed is not a superficial feeling of well being based on circumstances but a deep supernatural experience of contentment based on one's relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

Now we are told in the beatitudes who are the blessed ones and if you notice each condition seems paradoxical. The conditions and their corresponding blessings do not seem to match. By normal human standards such things as poverty, mourning, meekness etc. is not the stuff that happiness and contentedness is made off.

To the natural man and woman and even to the immature or worldly Christian such happiness sounds more like misery than blessedness. The world in which we live tells us that happiness is

being rich and successful or macho or glamorous or popular or famous etc. But the message from Jesus is that his kingdom is not of this world and therefore His way is the only true way to be blessed and truly happy and content within this world. The world says that things in this world satisfy. Acquiring things matters for it brings happiness, achieving things brings meaning to life and doing things brings satisfaction.

Yet even the most casual observation of life will soon reveal that there are many people who have many possessions and achieve much and work hard in doing many different things and yet there is no real happiness. That is no real contentment, which does not depend upon circumstances or things. Look how they react in a crisis and you will soon see the shallowness of their so-called happiness.

Jesus teaching is the very opposite. Jesus taught that often the physical advantages of this world could actually hinder true happiness and contentment. For the things of this world can lead us to pride, lust and self-satisfaction which are enemies of righteousness and enemies of true happiness. The worries of this world and the deceitfulness of riches actually choke God's word so that we become unfruitful (Matthew 13:22) that is discontent.

To seek and expect true happiness from this world is like seeking life among the dead. True happiness is found in Christ through our relationship with him, which is why we are constantly told in the bible not to seek the things of this world but to set our minds and hearts on heavenly things (Matthew 6:33 & Colossians 3:2).

We are told that we are not to love the world or the things of this world because this world is passing away and can never bring true happiness to people (1 John 2:15, 17). God through Jesus offers people a completely new way of life that involves a complete new way of thinking about life. It is a way of life that is focused on Jesus Christ and the blessing that comes to us through our relationship with Him.

It starts with having new life given to us by God, which changes our thinking so that we seek Him and the happiness that he brings rather than the false happiness that the world offers. So the first place to start this morning is to ask yourself do you have this life that only God gives to those who will repent and believe in Jesus Christ His Son.

Do you possess this happiness and contentment that is not dependent upon outward circumstances or dependant upon being successful in this world? If not then you need to seek God and the salvation that he gives as a free gift to all who seriously seek his mercy and grace. But perhaps there are people here who have received this new life yet your life is still lacking this happiness spoken of in these beatitudes. Perhaps you are living for this world and the things of this world.

Perhaps the pull of this world is too much for you and you love the things that this world offers and are seeking those things rather than seeking to develop and maturing your relationship with God. You can never find happiness in this world for such happiness is wafer thin for it is dependent upon circumstances. The first thing you must do is to repent of your sin of loving this world.

Then you must seek God and his grace to change your thinking so that you seek after the conditions laid down here in these beatitudes for happiness. Rather than seeking after things of this world that cannot bring true contentment and actually are a hindrance to true God given happiness and blessedness.

Before we look at the first condition for being blessed we must remember that the Beatitudes are actually pronouncements not probabilities. Jesus does not say that if we have the qualities of humility and poverty and meekness etc. then we are more likely to be blessed. Nor is blessedness

Jesus' wish for his people. No the Beatitudes are divine pronouncements for his people's blessedness.

We also need to note that the Beatitudes are progressive each leads to the other in a logical succession. I hope to show this more in future weeks as we go through each one of these beatitudes.

2. HOW TO BE BLESSED

We are told that it is the "poor in spirit" who are truly blessed. But we need to be careful that we understand fully what it means to be "poor in Spirit."

a) The Meaning of Poor in Spirit. - The Greek word "poor" comes from a verb meaning to "shrink" "cower" or "cringe." Classical Greek of the time used the word to refer to a person reduced to total destitution who crouched in a corner begging. So the word did not mean being poor but being so poor that one has to beg to survive.

The word is used in Luke 16:20 to describe the beggar Lazarus who was completely dependant on others he had absolutely no means of self support. But we must be clear that Jesus is not teaching about material poverty here but a spiritual poverty that corresponds to the material poverty of one who is so poor that he must beg to survive. If Jesus were talking about material poverty then he would have contradicted his clear teaching on helping those who are materially poor (5:42).

If being materially poor brought blessedness into one's life then Jesus would have commanded his people to help others to become materially poor which of course would be ridiculous.

In fact no New Testament believer is condemned for being rich but the bible warns us not to focus on riches because they can be a true hindrance in seeking after God and knowing this blessedness when one is poor in spirit. To be poor in spirit is to recognise one's spiritual poverty apart from God. It is to see oneself as we really are; lost, helpless and hopeless.

Apart from Jesus and his atoning work then every person is spiritually destitute, no matter what our education might be or no matter how wealthy we are in this world or no matter what our accomplishment or social status in life is. Now this is the point that Jesus is teaching in this first Beatitude. The poor in Spirit are those who recognise their total spiritual destitution and their complete dependence upon God. They perceive that there are no saving resources in themselves and that they can only beg for mercy and grace from a loving God. They understand that they have no spiritual merit and they know they can earn no spiritual reward.

The poor in spirit are not proud or self-assured they simply stand empty handed before a holy and righteous God.

This poverty of spirit is not an act put on for the sake of others for some people can sometimes act like spiritual beggars by doing and saying the right things in the company of God's people but the poor in spirit genuinely recognise their true spiritual plight. They are truly humble before God, broken-hearted with a broken and contrite heart.

I think we get a good description of someone who is poor in spirit from the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee was proud in spirit but the tax collector could not lift his head because he was poor in spirit. Being poor in spirit is a genuine sense of our own unworthiness before God.

b) Why Is Poor In Spirit The First Beatitude? - Why does Jesus put this beatitude right at the beginning of his sermon? The answer I think is very simple. Being poor in spirit is the foundation of all other graces; it is the most fundamental element in becoming a Christian. The opposite of being

poor in spirit is to be rich in spirit or to think of another word that means the same thing it is to be proud.

Pride has no part to play in God's kingdom in fact it keeps us from receiving his kingdom. Until a person surrenders pride then they will never be able to enter God's kingdom. We will never receive God's blessings until we are humble and until we sense our own unworthiness. We cannot receive eternal life until we admit we are dead in our sins.

We cannot begin the Christian life without being poor in spirit and we cannot continue upon the Christian pathway without poverty of spirit.

Yet we must confess that within the church of Jesus Christ today there is little consideration given to poverty of spirit. The church has often adopted the worldview on self-esteem and self-promotion and very little about denying self and taking up our cross and following Jesus. But until one is humbled and made poor in spirit then one will never receive salvation and unless one stays throughout our Christian lives poor in spirit then Christ will never be as dear to us as he should be. He will become obscured by our own pride and therefore it is good to remind ourselves every day just how helpless and hopeless we were without Christ. For in doing so we will begin to see just how glorious and majestic our Saviour is.

Once we see our own poverty before God then we will begin to see just how rich Christ is and how much of his riches we possess through our union with Him.

So being poor in spirit is the first beatitude because humility must precede everything else. No one receives the Kingdom of God until he recognises how undeserving he is. We will never know the blessing of true contentment and true happiness until we know daily this sense of poverty of spirit before God.

c) How Can We Become Poor In Spirit - It is clear by definition that poverty of spirit cannot start with us. It has nothing to do with our accomplishments or with our own power. Nor does poverty of spirit have anything to do with putting ourselves down for that can simply be another manifestation of being proud. The truth is that we are already spiritually put down and poverty of spirit simply recognises that truth. But recognising such a truth is not of ourselves but it is as a result of the gracious work of God by grace in our own hearts and minds. God makes us poor in spirit not simply to give us a sense of our need and our helpless condition but it is designed to lead us to the only one who can meet that need.

That is Jesus Christ and He meets that need through his work on the cross and through his resurrection.

Yet even though God produces genuine poverty of spirit as an element of his work of salvation, it is also true that Christians are commanded to be humble and to walk humbly before God (James 4:10). So although there must be a divine element in poverty of spirit there must also be physical co-operation and the bible holds both sides of this apparent paradox in tension.

But if there are human responsibilities to being humble and to live humbly then how can we help ourselves in remaining poor in spirit. Obviously we must daily pray for it. Pray that God will humble us and keep us humble daily. Pray that God will give us fresh reminders of our helpless state before God and our total dependency upon him for everything. Having done that we need to ask God for grace to daily turn our eyes from ourselves and to daily look to God. We need to seek God daily though the reading of his word and through prayer and through a desire to know his daily presence with us. Every day we need to meditate upon God and upon his attributes and His character.

The only way to remain poor in spirit is to gaze in faith upon God who is infinitely holy, pure and perfect and in doing so it allows us to see ourselves as sinners, who are helpless and doomed without God.

I think another thing that we must pray for is that God will remove those things from us that encourage and promote pride in our lives. Rather than looking for praise and compliments and popularity from others, surely we should be very wary of them.

However and this is where we must keep the balance because our sinful nature has a way of turning even the very best of intentions to its advantage we must be careful not to make an issue of avoiding praise either. The sin is not in receiving praise from others but in seeking it and glorying in it. So whatever causes us to become proud we need to ask God to remove those things from us so that we remain poor in spirit?

3. THE RESULT OF BEING POOR IN SPIRIT

Those who are poor in spirit belong to the kingdom of heaven. They do not receive the kingdom as a reward for being poor in spirit but as a consequence. Only those who humble themselves before Almighty God receive God's Kingdom within their hearts. Only those who acknowledge their own spiritual poverty before God will be saved.

If you are a Christian then you know what I am talking about, but if you are not a Christian or have no idea what I mean by poverty of spirit then in truth you have not received God's Kingdom.

Therefore you must ask God to humble you, to show you, your spiritual poverty before Him and then you must plead with God to be merciful and gracious to you and grant to you the Kingdom of heaven. But the wonderful thing is that we are being told here that poverty of spirit means we will receive God's Kingship in our hearts.

So can I plead with you to seek God's grace in this matter? Do you see that you are a spiritual failure that you cannot achieve or deserve or earn salvation in any way? Do you understand that only God can grant you the gift of eternal life? Do you realise that you are in a helpless and hopeless condition? Do you understand that you deserve hell and punishment? If so then do you understand that only God can save you through Jesus? Then call out to him and I can promise you that those who are poor in spirit belong to the Kingdom of heaven.

Therefore humble yourself before God and receive his wonderful grace in salvation. Then and only then will you be truly blessed?

Amen

MATTHEW 5:4

INTRODUCTION

We have all had times in our lives when we have mourned because something or someone that was dear to us was taken from us. Sometimes it is a tragedy that strikes and health is removed. Sometimes it is that notice that says that our job will end and we grieve the loss of the job and the income. At other times it is an insurmountable problem and we mourn the loss of being able to do anything about it.

Of course the greatest loss that causes us to mourn is not something but someone who we loved dearly whether it is our partner or child or grandchild or some other relative or friend that we were close to.

Have there not been times in our lives when we longed for that comfort that we so desperately needed during our time of loss. Yet to be honest that comfort is so often elusive, it seems that the deeper our sorrow the more elusive that comfort tends to be.

As we pointed out last time all the beatitudes are paradoxical because what they promise in return for what they demand seems to be upside down to the eyes of natural men and women. The paradox of this second beatitude is obvious. What could be more self-contradictory than the idea that those who mourn are those who are blessed (happy)? If you remember the happiness that the beatitudes talk about is the blessedness that is not dependent of outward circumstances or well being but is deep rooted within one's heart?

Jesus message here is that the path to happiness and blessedness is through mourning the way to rejoicing is through sadness. In the routine of ordinary day to day living this idea of mourning seems absurd. For it almost seems a universal principle that the way to happiness is to have things go your way.

In the eyes of the world pleasure brings happiness or money brings it or entertainment or fame or praise brings happiness. On the negative side it is believed that avoiding pain or trouble or disappointment or frustration or hardships and other problems is the path to happiness.

Throughout the history of the world it seems that people believe that favourable things bring happiness and unfavourable things bring unhappiness. The principle is so self evident to our world that most people would not even bother to debate it.

But in this beatitude Jesus says blessed are those who mourn and what Jesus is doing here is turning the world's principles upside down, he is reversing the path to true happiness. But we must endeavour to find out exactly what Jesus means by the word "mourning" before we can know how this sort of mourning leads to blessedness.

1. WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY MOURNING

The mourning, which Jesus is talking about in this beatitude, has nothing to do with the mourning that takes place over the loss of something or someone. Now of course the Lord is deeply concerned for us when we do mourn our loss especially the loss of our loved ones and he promises to console comfort and strengthen us at such times.

But that is not the type of mourning that Jesus has in mind here for Jesus is speaking of godly mourning a spiritual mourning that only those who desire to trust Christ or who have trusted Christ for salvation can experience. No unbeliever knows the type of mourning that Jesus has in mind unless the unbeliever is being awakened by the Spirit of God to his desperate spiritual need.

Paul speaks of this type of mourning in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. It is a mourning that brings spiritual life and spiritual growth it is mourning over sin that ultimately leads to a true repentance. This godly sorrow therefore is a sorrow over sin, which will lead to repentance.

Now let me show you how this mourning about sin is related to the first beatitude for as I said last time there is a progression in all these beatitudes one naturally leads on to the next one. As the first beatitude makes clear entrance into the kingdom of heaven begins with being "poor in spirit" it is recognition of our total spiritual bankruptcy.

The only way any person can come to Jesus Christ is empty handed, totally destitute and pleading for God's mercy and grace? Without a sense of spiritual poverty no one can enter the kingdom and when we enter the kingdom we must never lose that sense of knowing that nothing good dwells in us (Romans 7:18).

Spiritual poverty however leads to godly sorrow; the "poor in spirit" become those who mourn. David expressed his godly sorrow after he sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah in that great Psalm of repentance in Psalm 51. Job who is described as blameless and upright (Job 1:1) through all his experiences learnt the importance of mourning and repenting from sin (Job 42:5-6).

In the same way every Christian person who wants to know God's blessedness must learn from God's dealings with us and from His word how to mourn over our sin and rebellion.

It is interesting to note that within the New Testament there are nine different Greek words that are used to speak of sorrow or mourning. I think this variety teaches us something of the commonness of this experience in the lives of human beings. Sorrow and mourning is woven into the very fabric of human existence on earth we simply cannot escape it.

We all know that everyone of us will have experienced some time or mourning already and we all know that we will have to face many more should the Lord tarry. However of the nine words used for mourning or sorrow in the New Testament the word that is used here by Matthew ("pentheo") is the strongest of the words. The idea behind this word is a deep heart felt grief; it is the type of mourning that takes place when we lose a loved one through death. The word is used concerning the disciples who mourned for Jesus before they knew that he was raised from the dead (Mark 16:10). This is a deep inner agony, which may or may not be expressed in outward weeping.

True happiness however does not come in the mourning itself. Happiness comes from how God responds to it, for mourning because of sin leads to repentance and repentance leads to forgiveness and it's the knowledge that we are forgiven that leads to the state of blessedness.

Mourning you see is not merely a psychological or emotional experience that makes people feel better but this type of mourning that Jesus is calling for is a communion with the living God who responds to our mourning with the reality of forgiveness and freedom from our guilt.

But this mourning will never take place until we are "poor in spirit" and until we come to see something of the gravity of our sin and the extent of our rebellion against our loving and gracious God. It is only when we really mourn over sin and find God's gracious forgiveness that we will know true happiness, the happiness that God brings into the lives of those who are poor in spirit and mourn over their sin before God.

Our world tells us to "pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile." We are told by our own sinful nature to hide our problems and pretend to be happy, and sadly that same type of thinking is applied to sin. Hide it, put a brave face on it and try to forget it. But Jesus instruction about sin is very different.

We are to face up to its reality and mourn over it and then confess it and experience the liberty of forgiveness and the removal of guilt. It is no wonder that Jesus promises happiness to those who are serious about sin and mourn over it and seek God's forgiveness through Jesus. Sin and true happiness are totally incompatible where sin exists then happiness cannot but where happiness exists then sin cannot abide.

Until sin is mourned and confessed then sadly the experience of God's blessing is lacking, but once we deal with sin in God's way then forgiveness is experienced which results in a freedom and a joy that cannot be experienced in any other way. This is exactly what James teaches in his letter (James 4:8-10), Drawing near to God is only possible through a purity and cleansing of heart that can only take place when we mourn and weep over our sin and then seek forgiveness for our sin by humbling ourselves before God and confession. Then we are told God will lift us up.

I want to suggest that there is a great need in the church and in our own lives to weep and mourn over our sin. There is far too much laughing instead of mourning in modern Christianity. We need to be broken before God; we need a fresh understanding of sin and of its consequences and in particular how offensive our sin is to God.

We need a seriousness over sin that seems to be lacking in the church and in our modern age. It is never wrong to ask God daily to reveal our sin to us, to reveal something of our own hearts so that we can see just how rotten we actually are. We need to see how corrupt our motives and intentions are. How evil we really are and such an experience will be good for us all.

For the result will be that we will mourn over our sinfulness and we will confess our sin to God and will experience the joy of cleansing that follows because of Christ's death on our behalf. However we will also begin to see something of the immense love of God for sinners. We will begin to understand something of the depth of Christ work of atonement on the cross and we will begin to see how deep God's grace and mercy to sinners really goes.

There is a thinking within Christian circles that suggests that although we need to think about sin before we are saved; however after conversion we must focus of the victory that Jesus brings. Because all our sins are forgiven in Christ we need no longer to dwell upon it but instead we need to focus on our forgiveness and joy that comes to us through Christ.

But although it is true that all our sin is dealt with at the cross we need daily to confess that sin if we are going to experience the reality of forgiveness and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. All the godly saints of past generations that I have read about indicate that the more they grew in grace then the more aware of their sin they became.

The more aware of their sin they became then the more aware of God's goodness grace and mercy they became.

Now it is so easy to make light of sin even as Christian people, the temptation to do so is all around us. It's easy to laugh at the world's crude and immoral jokes even though we would never retell them. It's easy to be entertained by sin even though we would not indulge in it. We might smile at ungodly talk even though we do not approve of it or repeat the words.

It's easy to allow the world's attitudes towards sin to pervade our minds so that we become frivolous with sin in general and careless with our own sin in particular. It's easy to laugh at the sin of others but if we do it will not be long before we are laughing at our own sin and once that happens we begin to rejoice over sin instead of mourning.

As a result we will be robbed of the blessedness that God promises to those who mourn and we will fail to know the comfort that only God can bring to mourning sinners. Now that brings me to the second point.

2. THE RESULT OF MOURNING OVER SIN

We are told that the result of godly mourning is comfort. This is why mourners are blessed because they know the comfort that comes from God. Now it is only those who mourn that are comforted, those who laugh at sin and are causal with sin know nothing of the comfort that God brings. We know that God is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3); He is always ready to meet our needs by rebuking and correcting us or by encouraging and strengthening us. Now this comfort comes to us as we mourn we do not experience it unless and until we mourn over sin. But what is this comfort that is being spoken about here? I think primarily it's the comfort of knowing that our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

What a comfort this is to a mourning believer. Let's say God reveals to us something of our sinful hearts, which we find repulsive. We mourn that such sin could be found in our hearts and we cry out for forgiveness. What a joy and comfort it is to be assured from God's word and through the comfort of the Holy Spirit that we are forgiven because of Jesus death and resurrection.

We will not face the due penalty because Christ has faced it for us. Does that not bring true comfort, a comfort that results from something being done about the sin that is so abhorrent to us?

But there is also tremendous comfort in the knowledge that one day God will remove sin and all its effects from us forever. What a comfort to know that we will dwell in heaven in perfection and for the first time be able to live without sin and without its effects upon us. On that day all the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection will be fully applied and realised by each one of God's dear people. Then there will be no more pride or hate within us. Then we will not have to suffer or face sickness or even experience death.

That future hope surely brings great comfort to those who are mourning because of the sin that so often blights and spoils our relationship with our God here on earth.

But that ultimate comfort lies in the future for each one of God's people but in the meantime we must mourn and the Greek word is in the continuous tense so we must continually mourn over our sin. Then we will know and experience God's comfort of forgiveness here and now and the assurance that one day sin will be totally dealt with because of the death and resurrection of our Saviour.

So as we continually mourn over our sin we will continually know God's comfort and the result will be that we will be truly happy and blessed people.

Amen