

Kingdom Values

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Date: 29 January 2023

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[0 : 00] Do keep your Bibles open to Matthew chapter 5. And I do realize that as we start looking at the Sermon on the Mount, which we will be doing right to the end of, well, to the start of Easter or until Good Friday, that this sermon might be very familiar for many of you.

But I'm praying and hoping that even though it may be familiar, that it will still be fresh to us as we look again at it. And particularly that it might still continue to challenge us. As people that are still working to be more and more like Jesus.

Well, I'm sure some of you will know this by now, but it's no longer advantageous to be a Christian. That is, in terms of the eyes of society.

It used to be respectable to identify as a Christian. But, you know, let's say now if you're a politician, there are no votes to be gained by doing that.

It used to be that actually you could win a few votes by telling others that you were an upstanding Christian in society. But not anymore. It might even cost you a few votes. Likewise, your career prospects can now be threatened if you are too vocal about your Christian faith at work.

[1 : 20] I'm sure many of you probably realize that. You only have to ask Andrew Thorburn, who lost his job as chair of the Essendon Football Club.

He lasted for a day because of it. Now, some would say that it wasn't his faith itself, that, you know, it was just the fact that he belongs to a church which has controversial views.

Anyway, I think the point still stands, doesn't it? Being a Christian today no longer carries the same social benefit as it used to. But as we begin with the Sermon of the Mount today, I think this should really come as no surprise to us at all if we've been reading this sermon.

You see, being a follower of Jesus, belonging to God's kingdom, was never meant to be easy. Instead, we're required to live differently.

We have different values to the world, in opposition to the world. And as a result, we will stand out from the crowd. We will be made fun of from time to time.

[2 : 25] And some might even question our sanity. And yet, Jesus' introduction to his sermon tells us it's actually the way to true blessing.

Not the kind of blessing that many expect. Not the kind of reward that many seek. But blessing of a different kind. Blessing of the best kind, actually. But it does require us to accept being counter-cultural.

That is, to be different from the culture that we live in. To embrace what is the radical nature of God's kingdom. You see, if you don't, then when we come to this sermon, when we come to Jesus' teaching in general, when we come to the Bible, you will find yourself resisting what God's word says all the way.

But if we truly take what Jesus says to heart, then yes, it may turn our lives upside down. It may challenge us. It may cause us to stand out from society.

And sometimes like a sore thumb. But we will find true blessing. And strangely, as a community, the world will actually find us oddly attractive.

[3 : 41] They might not subscribe to our values, but yet they will be drawn, actually, to how blessed we are because of the values that we live out.

So, with that in mind, let's begin with the Beatitudes. So-called because the word Beatitude comes from the Latin blessed. And each of the eight Beatitudes begin with that word, blessed.

Now, there is a ninth occurrence of blessed. It's right at the end. But I will argue that it's part of the eighth and last Beatitude. So, we have eight in total. Now, if you're reading this for the first time, I think you would find that each Beatitude would be somewhat of a surprise to you.

Maybe even shocking and provocative. Because when you first look at it, all these things that you find Jesus saying, they don't appear to be blessings at all, do they? Poor.

Mourning. Hungry. How can these things actually be blessings? They all seem like negative things, don't they? But as we dig deeper, then what I think we'll find, as Jesus explains himself, is that these are true blessings of the kingdom.

[4 : 52] And so, you'll see from my outline, the insert in the newsletters, that I have divided the group of Beatitudes into three. They are uneven in number. The first are a group of four from verses three to six.

But let me begin to read again from verse one. So, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and began to teach them. He said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Now, I've grouped these together because I think they relate to the inner qualities that ought to mark those who belong to God's kingdom. These are qualities which God commands to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Now, each of these qualities do have their differences, but I think there is something common that actually binds them all together. So, I want you to have a look at them again and see if there's a word or phrase that jumps out at you that you think encapsulates all these qualities.

[6 : 09] A word or a phrase. So, I've got the question on the slide. Have a think, have a discussion with the person next to you, and then I might ask you to offer some suggestions in a while.

So, off you go. Okay.

Okay. So I'm asking for the word that jumps out to you straight away, so I don't need you to think too long about that. Anyone? Yes, Stephen.

Humility. Yep. Others? Sorry? In need. Yep. Good. Contribute. Yeah, you looked at the outline.

Good. Yep. Lowly. Lowly, yes. Okay. Any others besides contribute and lowly or anything that you can read on the page? Lacking.

[7 : 34] Lacking. Okay. Yep. Yep. I think they're all very good suggestions, and I think they're all quite similar, aren't they, within the semantic range of those words.

And, you know, I put in my outline, being contribute and lowly. The other word that I like to is humility, because I think in essence, that's what poor in spirit means, doesn't it?

Here, poor is not in the sense of physically poor, but spiritually poor. Or more precisely, I think, I think, not just being spiritually poor, but having a self-awareness of your poverty.

It's to realize that, you know, all by yourself, you don't have the spiritual resources to live the way that God wants you to.

That instead, you are in need, as someone says, or dependent on God to provide for them. Not just now, but ongoing, through the rest of your life.

[8 : 34] And so, when you're poor in spirit, I think it also leads to the other traits that are being mentioned. So, those who are poor in spirit also mourn, because they realize their own sin and moral failings, or the failings of the world.

The world is not as they should be, and they feel helpless to be rid of this situation without God. Likewise, the poor in spirit are also meek. Meekness here is not, you know, being like quiet, like a church mouse, or, you know, timid.

But rather, meek here is to carry oneself, or to be in a lowly or humble position. They're not arrogant, the meek are not arrogant, because they know they've got nothing to boast about.

Instead, what they do is thirst and hunger for righteousness. They know their lack. And again, this is not physical hunger or thirst, but a desire to be fed spiritually, so that they can become the people God intends them to be, full of integrity and righteousness, which they know they can't, and they need to depend on God for.

Now, for me, I think the prayer that best captures this disposition is actually the prayer of humble access that's found in our Anglican prayer books. I know we don't pull out the Anglican prayer book very often.

[9 : 50] I've got a copy here, my 1662 version. Look how new it is. But we have to credit Archbishop Kramer for this prayer from the 16th century.

I will read the original version, and I've got it on the screen, and see what you think. But the humble prayer of access says this, We do not presume to come to this thy table, and this is normally said before communion, to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies.

We are not worthy, and I like this is my favorite sentence, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs from under thy table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.

I don't know whether you're familiar with this prayer or not, but this is a powerful image, isn't it, when you look at it. You see, the point here is this, that dogs, you know, dogs are able to gather the crumbs from under the master's table.

You know, when the master drops some food, the dogs can pick it up. You know, nowadays, of course, with your pets, they don't even have to go for the crumbs, right? They get given the best on the table, you know, special treats and things like that.

[11 : 04] But, that's the point of the prayer, isn't it? And it comes from the Bible. We're not even deserving of the crumbs under the table, the spiritual crumbs, let alone sit at the Lord's table.

Now, when you read this prayer, or hear it, how does it sit with you? How do you feel, how do you think when it's read?

Does it resonate with you? Is this how you see yourself before God? Because if you do, then that's what poor in spirit is.

It's humbling, isn't it? It's a bit uncomfortable. And yet, Jesus says, bless it. Don't lose sight of the fact that he says, blessed are the poor in spirit.

That's right. There's great blessing in realizing how poor we are before God, because that primes us for God's blessing. It primes us for being comforted, for being filled.

[12 : 08] In fact, these are actually the preconditions for God to bless us. And there is no blessing from God, true blessings from God, without them. And so, you know, over the last one or two chapters in the early part of Matthew, John and Jesus have been going on about the same thing, isn't it?

They've been preaching repentance. Repent. Realize that you are poor in spirit, for this is the only way into the kingdom. And ironically, even though we're not worthy to gather up the crumbs of the kingdom, it's actually the realization of this, that's exactly what we need to enter the kingdom.

That's the great irony of it. The paradox of the Christian faith is all about this. Every other club or organization that you want to join, you know, they give you membership because you deserve it, don't they?

Like even, you know, take driving. You have to pass the driving test, right? Before they give you the license. If you want to be a doctor or a lawyer or engineer or whatever, you have to meet the qualifications before they allow you into that society or institute, don't they?

But to belong to God's kingdom, you actually need to realize you don't deserve it. Why? Because God's kingdom is built on the foundation of Christ's righteousness, not yours, not your deservingness, but Christ's merit, isn't it?

[13 : 37] And so if we go on with the prayer of humble excess, which finishes like this, it says, Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear son, Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that is, to have faith and rely on him, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.

Now, he in us, that's the idea of him filling us, isn't it, with his righteousness. But that requires us to be washed by his blood, to realize that we depend on Jesus.

We can't do it on our own. Now, I want to pause here for a minute, just to consider a bit more the nature of the blessings that are here. Because firstly, we need to realize that these blessings are all intrinsic to the kingdom.

They actually flow naturally out from the traits or qualities that are being described, of being poor in spirit, or mourning, or hungry. They are blessings that actually just occur when we belong to the kingdom, when we live out its values, when we're in relationship with God.

In other words, these are not blessings that, you know, we just tack on or add on when we enter the kingdom. No, it's what being in the kingdom is actually all about. To be in the kingdom is to be blessed, and these are the blessings that come, is what Jesus is saying.

[15 : 04] And so, consequently, all these blessings, you ought to look at them almost in tandem with each other. That is, you shouldn't be looking at them and go, you know what, I like number one and number four, so I'm just going to go for those.

Number two and three, not so much, I'll skip them. That's not how it works, is it? Because the traits, if they're all related, then means also that the blessings ought to go together as well.

Now, of course, the way Jesus has done it is he's written them out or expressed them in a stylistic way. So that, for example, logically, when we mourn, then we look to be comforted. When we're hungry or thirsty, we look to be filled.

So there's some logic to all of it. But there are others in the list that are actually a bit more general. And so we can't quite tie directly to the quality or trait. So if you look at the first and the last beatitude, for example, they're actually the same blessing.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Same as the last one, persecuted, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus has done that because he's trying to show you that actually, all the blessings relate to being in the kingdom.

[16 : 12] They're just bookends tying all the other blessings together. I'll give you another one, the one that is to do with the meek. Here, Jesus uses the idea of inheritance, I think, to allude back to the psalm that we had read for us by Michelle, Psalm 37, is to show that all the promises that God has made to Israel, all the promises of blessing, now actually apply and are fulfilled through Christ.

Now, I want to delve a bit deeper with Psalm 37 because when you read Psalm 37, meekness there is actually viewed as waiting for justice from the Lord. It goes hand in hand with waiting for justice.

It goes hand in hand with not fretting or succumbing to evil. And if you think about it, those are sort of similar, aren't they, to the traits that are being raised here in the Beatitudes.

Related, for example, to hungering for righteousness, not succumbing to evil. So, verse 7 says, wait patiently for the Lord. That idea of waiting and perhaps lamenting and mourning.

But don't fret when wicked people succeed or give in to evil. But rather, verse 9, hope in the Lord. Continue to wait on the Lord who will make things right in the end.

[17 : 29] So, there's a sense of there will be comfort if you are able to maintain your hope in the Lord Jesus even though you might be lamenting or mourning in the meantime.

So, I think many of the traits here of the Beatitudes actually have echoes there in Psalm 37 as well. And if you look through Psalm 37, you will see similar blessings as well. The one thing that's different is that the Psalm refers only to inheritance in the land as you can see on the slide there.

Jesus, however, extended to you will inherit the whole earth. And the reason for that is that now that we are in the New Testament, Jesus is now not just the King of Israel, is He?

But because the King of Israel is promised to be the ruler of all nations, Jesus is able to extend our inheritance beyond the land to all the earth.

All right, let's move on to the second set of blessings which I've got three. Grouped from verses 7 and 9. And here, I think we've moved from the inequalities of an individual in verses 3 to 6 to the qualities that are shown when we are in relationship with each other.

[18 : 43] So verse 7, Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.

Now, I don't want to press the divide too hard because there is a sense in which everything is sort of overlapping. But verses 3 to 6, you can sort of sense, isn't it, it's more about your vertical relationship with God, how you are before God, whereas verses 7 to 9 are about traits that reflect how you are in relationship with others.

As I said, both lists are related because the traits that God seeks in relationship with others really stem from your relationship with God, doesn't it? And ultimately, all of them reflect God's own character.

So, to be merciful, to be pure, to be peaceable, these are all things that God Himself displays. It's part of His character. And so, when we mimic them or when we do them, we mimic God.

So, we see, for example, that those who are peacemakers, God, Jesus says, are blessed because they will be called children of God, children of the God of peace.

[20 : 00] But here's a detail that maybe you might be wondering about. And I did when I read it. And it is this, that when we read each of the Beatitudes, all of them seem to be offering rewards there are in the future, aren't they?

Blessed are the poor in spirit for, well, that's the present tense, but everything else, they will be comforted. They will be filled. Right? It's almost in the future. And with the first four, that sort of made sense because you need to put yourself in a position of humility before you receive the kingdom.

But what about this second set? You know, how are we to show mercy unless we're first shown or experienced mercy? It ought to be that way around, isn't it?

Or, for example, how can we be pure in heart unless we first see God's own purity? And his righteousness. So, I think there is a sense in which, yes, that's true, you can only do good when you have first experienced God's goodness.

So, we forgive because we have first been forgiven, let's say. But I think Jesus also intends for these beatitudes to be motivational. That is, we're meant to keep going with them. Yes, we've been shown mercy, but we want to keep showing mercy because there's more mercy to be shown to us.

[21 : 17] And as we grow in mercy and purity and keep working at peacemaking, then we come to know God more and more fully. And we come to know the blessings of God more and more fully.

And of course, ultimately, all the blessings that we now experience are merely a glimpse, aren't they? A foretaste of the ultimate blessing that we will have when we see God face to face in Christ Jesus.

Conversely, if you have received mercy and you don't, you fail to show mercy, then whatever blessing that you have from knowing God or being in the kingdom, I think will over time start to diminish and fade away.

Because being in the kingdom of God is a bit like that, isn't it? It's not like you just enter and then that's it. But rather, we enter and we keep growing. And the more we grow in Christ, then the more of the blessings that we see and experience and come to benefit.

Now, I've had to really fly through these at speed and part of me really regrets this because, you know, I was thinking maybe we'd do one beatitude a week for eight weeks. We could do that, couldn't we?

[22 : 28] And in one sense, we ought to do that because it's so easy to just, yeah, this is the tenth time I've read this, just fly over them. But really, if we really ask ourselves, poor in spirit, all these things, it can really challenge us and it ought to challenge us, shouldn't it?

So we ought to pause and really take our time on it and I encourage you, go home, do it, maybe one a week for the rest of the week or something and really reflect on what, you know, where you're at with God and also where we are at as a church because some of these traits are really one another traits, aren't they?

And often, the one another traits are the ones that really reveal what really is going on in our own lives, isn't it? Poor in spirit, we can sort of hide but when we're not peacemaking, that comes out pretty obvious, isn't it?

So, just for tonight, what I want to do is just pause, give us a chance to reflect on how we're going and then maybe to share. So, share about good examples of kingdom values in the church, in our church and maybe share about areas for improvement.

How are we going as far as showing mercy or grace is concerned? How are we going with purity of heart? Do we harbor ill will, for example, towards others or are we jealous or do we show contempt?

[23 : 52] When there's conflict, how do we go in trying to make peace? Alright, if you're just visiting, you can talk about your own church if you want or maybe just listen in and see how badly you are doing as a church or how good, I don't know.

But anyway, the questions are on the slide so take a minute to share and then again, I would like to hear some examples. Okay. Let's not be too hard on ourselves just yet.

Let's start with some good examples. Anyone want to just, hopefully I'm not going to be able to, I'm not going to have to drag it out of you because it's readily available.

Anyone? Yeah, that was mainly people from the 1030 congregation, right? So we mustn't take too much credit for it here. Yeah. But there may have been one or two of you so well done, you know.

Others? Yeah. Yeah, that's wonderful. So if you didn't hear that, people staying on after dinner, after TYA to clear up after dinner, even when they're not on duty and even when nobody gives them recognition for it.

[25 : 02] Yeah. Thank you. That's great. All right. Unless someone is gagging to give the third one, we might move on to areas of improvement. Any?

It's a bit harder, isn't it? Because I know we have areas of improvement but we just, we don't want to, you know, say bad things about our congregation. Yes. No? All right.

Come and talk to me afterwards because I am interested to know because I think it's important, isn't it? It's not just patting ourselves on the back but if there's work to be done, humility to recognize that we need to do better with God's help then we ought to do it.

So please, send me an email, talk to me. I am encouraged, I have to say, because yeah, I mean it's true that as a church we're not perfect.

There is conflict from time to time. There are times when we get to it, you know, we get too passionate about certain things and we say or do the wrong things. So there's room for improvement there but I have to say that the thing that is the good thing that comes out of it though is that there is still a recognition because a lot of people will come to me afterwards after church and say, look, you know, God's word has really convicted me on this or that and the fact of the matter is they didn't need to come to talk to me.

[26 : 20] It's not evident. I look at them and look, Sammy looks like a very, you know, righteous Christian from the outside but I'm just using his name. He hasn't come to me but the fact that someone would come to me and say, look, I really felt that God has spoken to me and I need, that shows, doesn't it, a thirst and hunger for righteousness.

That's inside. That didn't need to be expressed. That humility didn't need to be, they didn't need to show themselves up to need improvement but they have done that and so, yes, we're not perfect.

That's true. We all have our flaws and sometimes we still could do with more mercy, we still could do with more purity in our hearts but the fact that we're hungering and desiring, that's the good flip side of it and that's the thing to be commended.

All right, let's finish with the last beatitude which I've put in its own section and that's to me for many, the thing that surprises the most or is the most confronting because it speaks of the blessing of being persecuted.

Verse 10, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

[27 : 31] So, if you weren't quite clear what persecution is, Jesus is spelling it out for you here. Insults, false accusations of evil. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now, let me just clear one thing up right at the start as to what persecution Jesus has in mind. It's persecution which arises from righteousness, verse 10, and on account of Jesus himself because of me, verse 11.

So, if you suffer because you've done silly things, even if it's the name of Jesus, then sorry, you're not covered. Okay?

Don't go around saying I'm suffering for Jesus and therefore I can act like a, you know, I don't want to use the word, but idiot. But, if you act righteously for Jesus and are persecuted for it, then yes, great is your reward in heaven.

Now, specifically what Jesus says is the reward is not mentioned here, but I think it will involve some sort of vindication as was promised in Psalm 37, that on the final day of judgment, those who have done right will be recognized for it by the Lord and those who have done wicked, they will be no more.

[28 : 58] They will be judged. But here's the thing, you might wonder, why is it that, you know, a person who is meant to be meek or lonely or merciful or peace-loving, why would they suffer persecution in the first place?

I mean, these are nice people. Who would want to persecute them? Why does Jesus at the end sort of shift gears and say, blessed are those who are persecuted?

And here, persecuted is not just being taken advantage of. Jesus gives us examples, doesn't he? Falsely accused of all kinds of evil, right? Insulted. Why?

Why would someone who is meek suffer all these things? Well, I think the clue lies in the very last sentence, doesn't it? You see, when we hunger for righteousness, when we desire purity, then our conscience will not allow us to do what is false, right?

We will be committed to God's truth and our actions and words will reflect it. Which means that no matter how gracious or gentle we are, our actions or words will shine a light on sin and, in particular, the sinfulness of others.

[30 : 17] And so, ultimately, whether we use words or actions, our message to others is the same, isn't it? By standing up for what is good and right, we're saying to others, you need to repent and recognize that you are poor in spirit, that you need the Lord Jesus.

Now, for those people who accept and receive this message well, then that's a blessing for them, isn't it? But for those who refuse this message, then that is actually a very confronting and challenging message to them.

It's really putting them on the spot, isn't it? And so, Jesus compares us with the prophets of old because that was the same task that they had as God's messengers to speak the truth and call people to repentance.

And just as darkness abhors the light, those who remain in sin and pride, unfortunately, will detest the truth and those who bear witness to the truth.

And so, that's why we will be persecuted. Now, in the next section on the salt and light, I think that's a connection there, isn't it? Because by being salt and light, what we do is stand out and that brings with it the reality of persecution.

[31 : 36] But Jesus, again, reminds us that when that occurs, when persecution comes because of Him, please, take comfort in that. Why?

Because that's a mark of being in the Kingdom of God. Realize that when people oppose you, that actually you belong to God.

Alright, let me finish. We all hate false advertising, don't we? You know, when they try and sell you something, but they hide all the nasty details in the fine print or something.

Some of you may have gone on the internet and, you know, looked at pictures of B&B, maybe NBNB, and, you know, they show you that beautiful picture of the kitchen, that huge lounge, and then you turn up and the bathroom is tiny, you know, no en suite, maybe.

The bedroom, pokey, you know, three people squashed into one bed kind of thing. Or perhaps, I know you've not fallen for any of that, but anyway, or they might give you all the beautiful pictures of the house itself, the interiors, and then they don't tell you that actually it's situated in the roughest part of town.

[32 : 52] You know, when you leave the door, you know, you have to arm yourself or get mugged. Well, Jesus doesn't do this, does he? No nasty details.

He gives it all up front. Do you desire to follow Jesus? Well, expect persecution. Expect false accusations. Expect to be humbled. Expect to mourn and thirst.

blessed. But, despite all that, know that the Christian life is truly blessed. That actually, you get to share in Christ's inheritance.

You get the joy of living as his disciple. You get to be more and more like him. And one day, when all these hardships will disappear, they will.

All you're left with is the full and abundant blessing of life in the kingdom. So, Jesus gives us all of it, isn't it? But then he invites us to see beyond the hardship, to see beyond the poverty, to see beyond the mourning, and to see actually the rich blessing, the great and true reward that will come by being in the kingdom.

[34 : 01] Now, in the coming weeks, we'll look in more great detail as to what living in the kingdom looks like in practice. But today, what Jesus does with his introduction is to call us to embrace these counter-cultural kingdom values.

To accept that, yes, there will be challenges, there will be persecution, but to whet your appetite, really, to the true blessings that will come in and through it all.

Let's pray. Father, we are not worthy so much as to gather the crumbs from under your table, nor to sit in your kingdom. and yet, thanks to the Lord Jesus, we're able to if we are humble and repentant.

Help us to remain contrite and lowly in spirit, to thirst for righteousness, and to show others the same mercy and grace that you've shown us. Give to us a spirit of gentleness and peace, and help us to count ourselves worthy to suffer persecution for his sake.

fix our eyes on the true reward that is ours in the kingdom of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.