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The Beatitudes - Chapter 1

"The Beatitudes"

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If you would turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew's gospel, Matthew's gospel and chapter 5. We're beginning this Lord's day morning, a series within the word of God that I hope to continue almost to Christmas - so let that not put you off - but we hope to be blessed as we ponder some of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ within Matthew's Gospel. Within chapter 5, 6 and 7 of the first gospel record we have what is entitled the 'Sermon on the Mount'. We are not going to take time to deal with the whole of the sermon, but we intend to look these next few weeks at what is called the Beatitudes of the Lord Jesus Christ. So I want this morning to give just an introduction to this great and mighty subject, of these things that tell us how we can be blessed within the life that the Lord Jesus Christ gives us.

So let us read from verse 1 of chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven".

Let us ask the Lord's help as we come to His word this morning: Our dear God and Father, we thank Thee this morning for the great word of God. We thank Thee that we have before us the record of that blessed Man, that blessed Person, God incarnate: the Lord Jesus Christ - that we have before us, untampered, unharmed, undiluted, unadulterated the very words of that blessed Man. Lord, help us to treat them with reverence today, help us to treat them, as they are, with awesome holiness. And Lord the only way that we can do that this morning is to heed the word of God to our hearts, to not be like the Pharisees and the Scribes - to be hearers of the word, to be arguers of each little jot and tittle of the word, to feel, as we look into the mirror of God's word, to look into it and to walk away like that man in James and forget what we look like. But help us this morning, to be doers also of that word and Lord we will not be doers of that word unless the

very Spirit of the word of God raises up that word, takes it and applies it, and puts it like a very bullet into our soul, that we may walk out of this place having the living word of God within our very soul and being. Lord bless us today, give us of Thy Spirit, as Thou hast promised that if we ask today Thou wilt give us. Lord we pray that Thou wilt take a dealing with us in this place, for we ask all these things in the blessed name of the Man who spoke these blessed words, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matthew's gospel is the first gospel within the New Testament record. Matthew as we all know - Levi before he was converted - he was a collector of tolls, he was a publican, he went around collecting taxes. But when the Lord Jesus Christ came to Matthew and when he had an encounter with the living Son of God in flesh, we read that that man Matthew became a collector of souls. He followed Christ, he became a fisher of men and we have, in such detail within this Gospel, how Matthew followed, how the disciples followed, and the life recorded of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 1, if you look at it, of Matthew's gospel we find there His birth - the birth of that blessed Saviour, the One who would be called Jesus, because He would save His people from their sin. Chapter 1, His nativity; chapter 2 we find His dignity, because we read there how the wise men came from the east and they brought those rich jewels and frankincense and gold and myrrh and they placed it at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they worshipped His majesty and His dignity because of who He was. In chapter 3 we read about His baptism, that He is declared there by God the Father and He says of His Son, 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. And there we see that the Holy Ghost of God descends and anoints the Lord Jesus Christ for the ministry that He would have as He healed the sick, as He made blind eyes to see, as He delivered the captives - even He needed an anointing from God the Holy Spirit to bring Him that power. Then in chapter 4 we find His temptation, where there the very devil himself, eyeball to eyeball, tries to divert the Son of God from His eternal purpose of going to the cross, of dying for a sinful world and of redeeming a people for Himself. And then in chapter 5, the chapter that we have read together this morning, we have His teaching, His preaching. His nativity in chapter 1, His dignity in chapter 2, Matthew outlines His baptism in chapter 3, His temptation in chapter 4 and as He sets out upon His earthly ministry here, we have in chapters 5, 6 and 7 His preaching.

The date is probably spring of the year 28 AD. We learn from Luke's Gospel chapter 6, that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke these great words after a night that He had spent alone with God in prayer. After that night of prayer He goes, the word of God tells us in Mark 3, He chooses twelve disciples to follow Him. Then we read that He goes about healing many of their sickness and their diseases and after all that, on the same day, He sits down upon this mountain, as we read in verse 1 of chapter 5, and He gives this great sermon - the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount consists really of three sections. The first section we find in chapter 5 and verses 2 to 16, there the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to us of the citizens of the Kingdom of God. He speaks specifically of their character and their blessedness in the eyes of God. Then secondly in chapter 5 verse 17, to chapter 7 verse 12, He outlines for us not the citizens of the Kingdom, but the righteousness of the Kingdom. In other words the standards of life that are required, that are demanded by the King, of His subjects within the Kingdom. You'll remember reading those words, where the Lord Jesus Christ exhorts His followers and His disciples to love God and nothing else, to serve God alone with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. Then He tells them how to serve and the righteousness required, man-ward within the Kingdom - that they are to love their neighbour as themselves. And in order to sum all of that up, He gives them the golden rule which even other religions and cults today have adopted - pure truth that you cannot dilute, that cannot be misunderstood - listen to these awesome words this morning: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. What an awesome sermon this is, what an awesome message this is from the very courts of God to men, through God incarnate - the Lord Jesus Christ.

One group in our world today says that the Beatitudes are a plan of salvation, that in order to get to Heaven you must follow these guidelines, you must obey these rules of the Lord Jesus. Another group in the world

today say that it is a charter for world peace and they beg the nations of the world to heed it and then there will be world peace and tranquillity. There's another group that say that it's not for today, that it's for the future, even for believers, in a kingdom that is yet to come and there will be an earthly reign, a millennial kingdom upon this earth where the Lord Jesus Christ will be the King - and that is true - and there will be a consummation of this, where we will live in the beauty of holiness and across that temple, the Lord Jesus Christ and His people, here on earth, there will be holiness unto the Lord.

But what about this message to us today? I want to speak to you about two things this morning. In introduction to this great sermon and our exposition of it, I want us to think first of all of the preacher, and then secondly of His preaching. The Master and His message, the Preacher and His preaching, the Teacher and His teaching, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the One who stood before them, and the message that He delivered.

Thomas Watson, the puritan, says this, 'He, the Lord Jesus Christ, has a title that has been given to other preachers of our day and our century and our world, but He alone is the Prince of Preachers. He alone is the best of expositors'. It says in verses 1 and 2, if you'll look at it, that He went up. Thomas Watson says, 'The One in whom there was a combination of virtues, a constellation of beauties, the One in whose lips there was not only sweet as honeycomb, but His very words did drop as honeycomb. His words were an oracle, His works were a miracle, His life was a pattern, His death was a sacrifice, and it was He, that blessed Man, who went up into this mountain and sat down and spake unto His disciples'. This great Man, this great Preacher, the Son of God, God the Son, God incarnate, He was the greatest of all preachers and teachers and He was enabled and qualified to teach in the way He did.

There are three things quickly that I want us to meditate and ponder upon when we look at the Preacher. The first thing is this: when He preached He made sense; the second thing is: when He preached He had power; and the third thing is: when He preached He was successful. Let's look at the first for a moment: when He preached He made sense. In John chapter 3 and verse 34 we read this, that this Preacher, this Preacher sent as a missionary from the very realms of glory and Heaven, He came into this world and John says that this Man, as a Preacher of the word of God, He had the Spirit without measure. Think of that! My friends tonight, I dare to say that there has never been a preacher that has walked this soil that has ever had the Spirit without measure as our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. He was a Preacher that made sense! The great interpreter of the word of God, He is the only commentary that we can have on it. The Holy Spirit Himself who inspired the word of God, Jesus Christ had a monopoly of Him. How He could teach the word of God!

Do you remember the words of that woman at the well? That woman of Samaria, what did she say to her friend? She said, after listening to the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Come see a Man which told me all things that ever I did'.

The word of God is a mirror isn't it? Why do we need a mirror? We need a mirror to see our likeness. And it's not a mirror that tarts us up or makes us look better than we are - although we may like that at times - but the best mirror that we can have is the mirror that gives us a true likeness of ourselves. My friends, this morning, when the Lord Jesus Christ preached He made sense. He didn't beat around the bush, He didn't use woolly words. He told it as it was, He preached the word of God in pureness, and He was the One we - and as I preach this morning, I can hardly even know some of your faces - but He was the Preacher that knew the very hearts of the ones He spoke to. Can you conceive that this morning? And just as He knew, as He was in the carpentry shop of His father, which tool He needed for which job He did there - the same as He stood and preached the word of God, He knew which truth that was needed for every single heart that was there. My friends, when He preached, He made sense.

But secondly: when He preached He had power. Matthew, the Gospel recorder says in chapter 7 and verse 29: 'He spake with authority'. The Bible says that as He spoke, He made naked the very conscience of every man and woman, boy and girl before Him - because He preached in power. He uncovered the secrets of men's hearts - things that no one could have known. So much so, that when He uncovered the very sins of that woman at the well of Sychar, about how many husbands she had had - and that the one who was with her at that moment was not her husband - she looked into His eyes and she said: 'I perceive that Thou art a prophet'. Oh, what power the Saviour had!

It was said of Luther, that one has said that it would be better said of Christ that He spake as if He had been within a man. My friend, with laser eyes the Saviour Himself - no matter who you are, saint or sinner today - He can see into your very breast, He can see into your inner thoughts, your conscience, your motives, your actions, your deeds, the things that are done in quiet places, He knows it all because He preached with power. And when He pierced sinners' consciences with the two-edged sword of His tongue, that Man, that blessed Man, men said of Him: 'Never, never ever in all of history, in all of time, never ever shall there be a man that spake like this Man'. A man that made sense and a man who had power.

But thirdly: when He preached - oh, how different He is than some today - when He preached He had success. This Man was wise to the winning of souls! He knew the art of converting souls, of every class, of every distinction, from every background and conceivable sin. John 10:42 said: 'Many believed in Him'. We read in John 12:42 that even among the chief rulers many believed in Him. Psalm 45 and verse 2 says prophetically of that blessed Person: 'Grace poured from His lips'. My friends this morning, it poured not just from His lips unto empty ground, but the Lord Jesus Christ had the power, He had ability, He had the success to pour that grace into the very hearts of men and women who stood before Him. He had the key of their soul, their conscience, their mind, their will. He had the key of it that, when He put it into their heart's door, He could open and enter at His will and no man at His appeal dare not surrender. What a preacher He was. Can you not see it? And as He sat - what was the sign of authority in the days of Palestine? That He sat as One who had sense, as One who had power, One who had spiritual success with men and with God - He sat in authority. And He spoke these wonderful words that we read this morning. Do you see His pulpit? Where was His pulpit? Was it in a fancy church? No. Was it in a cathedral? Was it at a Bible conference? Where was it? It says in verse 1 and 2 that 'He went up to a mountain' - the mountain was His pulpit! Why? Because a mountain was convenient for the people.

My friend never forget, the church of Jesus Christ is not to be an incubator of truth, we are not to close ourselves in from a dying, damned world and say, 'Well, we will conserve our truth'. My friends, He went to the people who needed Him and He told the word of God as it was - and because of that, in the pulpit that He was in, the Preacher that He was, there were those saved. And do you see His passion? I think this is beautiful. It says in verse 1 that seeing the multitudes, seeing the multitudes - He looked upon them and many thronged to hear Him because they knew that what He was saying was worthwhile, and the Christ that came from heaven to save souls, He could not, He would not leave them without giving them a message of hope, a message of the gospel. The One who had compassion on the weak, the broken, the bruised bodies, much more had compassion upon dead souls.

My friends, as we look at this passage and as we enter this exposition of God's word, I want you not to see the sermon before you see the awesome preacher - the Man who preached this message. And so I want us to look secondly this morning at His preaching. The preacher and His preaching. It is often said in a humorous way: 'Practice what you preach'. Isn't that right? But I think it's better turned around the other way, 'Preach what you practice'. Look at this sermon, look at the Beatitudes of the Lord Jesus Christ and if you look at it closely enough, and if you look in parallel at the blessed life of the holy Son of God, you will see that this sermon itself is an unconscious self-portrayal of the life of the Son of God. Here is a Man who, when He is exhorting others, He does not become disqualified, He does not become a vagabond. He is not like when

Paul describes those who stand and give truth and walk away and they forget that truth, and they commit the sins themselves that they are warning against. But this very sermon from the lips of the blessed Son of God was a disclosure of the heart of the missionary Son. And when He describes His ideal, He describes Himself. Do you know what this is all about? It can be summed up in one word. All of these many words of the Beatitudes, even the many words of the Sermon on the Mount, summed up in one word: Christlikeness, Christlikeness. Look at these words, 'Blessed are they, blessed are they, blessed are they', and as you look at every single one of them, do you ask yourself: 'Well, do I have that in my life? Is that an intricate part of my daily walk of every hour of my day?' - because friend today, if you're walking in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God is like dynamite in your breast, it must be! It must be!

The key verse to understanding the Beatitudes, I believe, is found in verse 20. The Lord Jesus Christ, remember, is addressing within the backdrop and the background and the context of the Scribes and the Pharisees. And He says within verse 20: 'For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case', in no way, 'enter into the kingdom of heaven'. What did He mean? Well simply this: the Lord Jesus Christ in His ministry had entered into a situation where the religious leaders of His day, the Pharisees [and] Scribes, were basing their approach to God, were basing their acceptance with a holy righteous God, Jehovah, upon their external righteousness. Have you got that? External righteousness. So much so, that they had 600 plus little petty rules and regulations added to the word of God by which they could come closer to God Himself. What does the Lord Jesus say? He says this: 'Unless your righteousness, my disciples, unless your goodness, your good works, exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees and the Scribes you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven'.

What's He saying? Simply this, that unless your righteousness is internal you have no hope of heaven. It's not externality, it's not like the Pharisees: how long your beard is; how long the gown you wear is; the colour of it; what you do on the Sabbath day; whether you trail a chair across the ground and it constitutes ploughing; whether you lift wood; whether you speak; whether you do other things that were prohibited on the Sabbath day and certain parts of it. It is nothing to do with externalities the Lord Jesus Christ is saying, but He is saying it is something deep within your soul - it is something internal. You know, they always accused Him of destroying the law: 'He's not saying what the law said'. That's why in verse 17, if you look at it, He says: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fill up'. 'I am not come to take the law away, but the law is lacking, the law is not the finish. I have come to finish it, to fill up that glass, to be the purpose of the law. I, myself as I stand before you, Jesus Christ the Son of God, am the fulfilment of it'.

What is a Christian? If you were asked that question today, what would you say? What is a Christian? What is an evangelical? How would you define it? R. Kent Hughes, who is an American expositor and preacher, has written a book. And his book has come in response to that question - that in a world in which we live today, where Roman Catholics can say now that they are evangelical, or this that and the other, if they use the same language, if they do the same things, sing the same songs and preach from the same book they are classed as evangelicals, born again Christians. And in response to that question and that dilemma, he has written a book entitled this: 'Are evangelicals born again?'. 'Are evangelicals born again?'. And what it is, is a commentary upon the Beatitudes, in other words what he is saying is this: that if you do not have in your life the prime substance, or even an indication of what we find in the Beatitudes, it is doubtful that you are born again. One quote that I read this week from Professor David Welles said this on the term evangelical he said, 'It is descriptively anaemic. Today in our world it means nothing'.

A recent gallop poll said that Christians within the United States of America, they had no understanding - some of them - had no understanding of what the word of God taught. Another poll taken said that one third of America claimed to be born again Christians. And this man, Kent Hughes, asked the question: if that is so and if one third of our population is born again - and I don't know the figures for here in Ulster, but I suspect

that it is something similar - why is it that our influence upon our culture and our society is a non-event? Why is it? Can we say, verse 13, that we are the salt of Ulster? Can we say that? Can we say that we are the light of Ulster, we are the purifying influence within this society for God and for Christ and for His church? Could it be that many who class themselves as evangelical are not born again?

How could that be? There's a few reasons quickly, I'd love to spend more time in this, but there's a few reasons and I believe one of them is that the world has infiltrated us. And I'm not talking about your dress, get by that, that's Pharisaical! It's the heart, it's attitudes, it's perceptions, it's your conscience, and I believe that culturally, theologically, morally the world has infiltrated us. Look at this culture: we are in a technological revival. There is almost nothing that man can't do today with regards to technology and that attitude can infiltrate the church, that we in our world have a focus upon ourselves rather than a God focus, a God consciousness. When man has nothing, when man has no money, when man has no machines, when man has no status of himself, what does he usually do? He turns to God and looks for help. Culturally, politically, we can politicise the gospel, we can make it red, white and blue, we can make it green, white and gold and culturally we can have the very world itself - without realizing it - infiltrating us, so much so that we can't emanate those blessed blessednesses in the Beatitudes.

Theology, theologically, I'm not talking about liberalism, that's not what I'm talking about. But what I am talking about is ministering to felt needs, rather than ministering the word of God. 'I feel this way, so we need to minister to that need. There is this need, there is that need' - rather than taking God's word as to what the need really is within His word, and teach and preach systematically the word of God, so that He who knows the deepest need of our heart and soul - that we perhaps could be overlooking - He can minister even at times when we don't even know He's doing it. Morally, like the Pharisees we can have attitudes to sin, we can have attitudes to smoking, to drinking, but one survey - and I know you have to be careful about surveys - but this troubles me: one survey said that evangelical Christians, on the whole, there was no difference between them and the world in their ethical professions, about what was ethical and what was not. Now my friend this morning, if that is so in respect to becoming an evangelical today, it could be that it makes no difference to our life at all when we get saved.

Have we failed to infiltrate the world? They may have infiltrated us in our attitudes and the things that we say and think. But have we failed to infiltrate the world? Have we created a culture within our society, rather than creating conversion - where we say like the Pharisees, and this is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about, that if you display similar religious traits to me, you will be accepted? We can do it with our language, our vocabulary.

In the book of Judges we read about two nations, the Gileadites and the Ephraimites, they were both at war. They could not tell the difference between one another, except for one thing: the Gileadites could pronounce 'sh' and the Ephraimites couldn't. So they devised a password, 'Shibboleth' they called it, that was the word. And they knew that if the enemy was there they would ask: 'What is the password?' - and if he was a Gileadite, if he was one of them he would say: 'Shibboleth'. But if he was an Ephraimite he couldn't pronounce 'sh', so he said: 'Sibboleth' - and they knew by their vocabulary, and nothing more, what they were.

My friends this morning, in the light of the Sermon on the Mount, sometimes I wonder if we have the right language, if we use it in the right way, it will fool most of the people most of the time? It could be vocabulary, it could be social convention. If you go to the right places, you don't go to the wrong places, if you've certain likes, dislikes, your behaviour, what you do, what you don't do, it could be heritage - and I know that this is preached so often in the gospel that if our parents are Christians it's just natural, is it not natural at times that if your parent is a Christian for you to fall into the swing of things and place yourself beyond doubt?

Friends today, sometimes walking the Christian path - and I say the Christian path as opposed to be born again - it can be the easiest option in your life. Now I'm speaking to children of believers here this morning, that believe they are saved, and could it be that you're not? What I mean by that is this: could it be that you chose this road because it's the least path of resistance? In other words, if you chose to go into the world or do something else it would disrupt your family relationships - think of it - it would disrupt your social relationships, your friendships. Could it be that the road can be chosen because a Biblical life, a Christian life is a healthy life? It's a healthy, satisfying life for anyone in the world if you follow it. Or do we know, friends this morning, within the depths of our heart and soul that we are born again? That we have the life of God within our breast - is it like the Beatitudes because God lives in our heart? You might say, 'David I'm a Christian, I gave my life to Christ as a child. I believe, I made my decision, I walked down an aisle, I signed a card, I read a booklet, I prayed with a man'. Can I ask you this morning: nowhere in the Bible does proof of salvation be pointed to the past. What do I mean by that? I'm not talking about the cross, that is how we are saved, of course it is, and that is in the past. But what I am talking about is this: Paul says within the word of God, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith - and that word 'test', the word 'examine' is the present continuous tense which means this: test yourself now, continually test yourself every day whether you are saved or not. And Paul, and the word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the whole Bible - and sometimes I wonder have we forgotten it - it says that the way we can be assured of our salvation is the way we are living now.

That is the message of the Sermon on the Mount. It's not 'easy believism'. It's not 'put your hand up and God will give everything that Christ died for'. My friends this morning, the Beatitudes, the Beatitudes - you might say, 'But David, look at all these blessed, these are impossible' - this is the whole point of it my friends, that as we look at these things, the Lord Jesus Christ meant these to be an atomic bomb to our self-righteousness. He meant it to do violence to our pride, our self-ability, our self-dependence and satisfaction. Christ meant it to destroy us! Why? Because if we think, for one moment, that we can get along [without] God's help, He'll let us go along and then we'll crash. And when we crash we need to look to Him and cry for mercy and if you're here this morning - and I'm finished - but if you're here this morning and as we look at the future weeks that we think of the Sermon on the Mount and you say, 'David, I can't begin to do these things'. You know what I say to you? You know what Jesus says to you? 'Blessed are ye, poor in spirit: for yours is the kingdom of heaven'.

And as we enter a new study of the word of God, and as I believe God will speak to our hearts about how we emulate the life of His Son, let's come before Him this morning - those that are believers - and say: 'Lord as I look to myself I am poor in spirit, I am weak, I can do nothing', and look for the life of God in Christ. And perhaps there's an unbeliever here this morning, or someone who thought they were a believer and as they've heard the word of God and as it's described through the Beatitudes what a believer is you find that you fall short. Why not come to Christ this morning? And be sure of the life of God in your very soul.

Our Father, we thank Thee for Thy word. Oh it is searing, it is searching, it is destroying, but we thank Thee that we have a Saviour who builds up, who releases from bondage and who gives eternal life to the broken soul. Lord, minister this morning we pray, and bless us now as we part, for Christ's sake. Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 2

"What Is Happiness?"

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We're turning in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel again, and chapter 5, Matthew's gospel and chapter 5. And you'll remember, if you were here two weeks ago, that we began a series on the sermon on the mount, and we remembered that the sermon on the mount consists of chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7 of Matthew's gospel. We are thinking specifically of the first few verses of this great sermon of the Lord Jesus. We thought, the first week of our study, about the Preacher Himself, about the way the Lord Jesus Christ preached on this mount. Then we thought secondly, about His preaching, the contents of the message of the sermon on the mount. We're going to think today, not upon the first Beatitude - in fact not upon any of them - because there's one little word that is so important to our understanding of this whole subject of the Beatitudes. We're going to begin reading, the whole passage again, from verse 1 of chapter 5:

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set" - sat down - "his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Let us pray: Our dear Father, we thank Thee for Thy word - and dear God it's such a privilege to open it here today, to speak from it, to seek to understand it, to seek to grapple with the issues that it raises to our hearts and lives, to contemporary society today. But Lord we pray today, that we would not apply this word to the person beside us, that we would not apply it to those in our family, or our friends, or our politicians, or our government - but Lord, we would apply it to ourselves. Lord we pray that Thou wilt help us, speak to us, come by Thy Holy Spirit and lift up the power of Thy word - the sword of the Spirit - and pierce our hearts, and Lord speak to us today from Thy word, but, yes, from Thy very mouth itself. That we may know today, that God has been here, that God has been speaking loud and clear - that we may know the responsibility that

is ours to act upon that word and to live in its light. Help me now Lord, I pray, fill me with the Holy Spirit of God, for I pray in Christ - Christ Jesus' name, Amen.

The question is often asked: 'What is happiness?...What is happiness - and if we can define what happiness is, true happiness and joy - well then if we know what it is, well then how can we find it?'. How many times have you heard, in your hearing: 'Happiness is what life is all about...happiness is what really matters'. Whatever you strive after in this life, whatever is your motivation for living - if it is for the purpose, and the achievement and result of happiness - people today, and our world at large, believes - well, then it is a worthy cause. Is not this the obvious cause of every man and woman that lives today?

How do people strive for it in our society and even in the church at large? Some do it through marriage, some through divorce. Some do it through sex, some do it through other immoral relationships. Some do it through drug abuse, through music, through alcohol, through wealth, through eating, through dieting, through psychology, sociology - so many rooms that they go into and they hope that they will find within those rooms the great treasure of happiness, life's fulfilment, life's joy. Of course the god of this age, today, the god of the latter part of the twentieth century and indeed, I think, the twenty-first century, is the god of 'sex'. And society says at large today: 'Well, this is the road to happiness, this is the road to satisfaction. The road to fulfilment is to fulfil and execute your sexual drive and then you will find happiness'. It's all over our newspapers, in our magazines - we can't turn 'till we see a billboard, even advertising ice-cream, and what do they use? They use sexual relationships to do it, because people have imbibed within their mind that they will find fulfilment through that medium. Some feel that they will find happiness in sport, others find it in the television, in the media. Some find it socially at the pubs and the clubs where they meet new people, where they bond new friendships. And some people - and I say this very carefully and calculated this morning - some people even believe they will find it in suicide.

For most people it is life's ultimate gain. Blaise Pascal was a seventeenth century mathematical genius - if you study maths or physics at school you will see this man, and even if you've studied philosophy you might meet him, because he was also a religious thinker - some have described Pascal as one of the great minds of western intellectual history. And he said on this subject of happiness, listen to it, and I quote to you: "All men seek happiness, this is without exception. Whatever different means they use, all men tend towards this end. Some go to war, others avoid it - but all have the same desire in view. In fact, the human will never takes the least step but towards this one object - happiness. It is the motive of every action, of every man and even of those who hang themselves". People may find it in the bottle, people may find it in a bottle of pills - that takes away their anguish, that takes away their emptiness, that takes away their thoughts of despair - and [there are] even those, tragically, in our world today who find that the only way that they can achieve happiness is to take their life to get away from their problems, their perplexities, their tribulations and to escape somehow.

I wonder have you ever asked the question: "What is happiness?". I believe, today, that the problem about happiness is the fact that it's so elusive, it's so hard to put your hands on what happiness really is. It's so hard to define it, it's not something you can touch, it's something that is totally subjective - man can't seem to define it, only by talking about external things that affect their lives. In the Daily Mail recently the former Chief Rabbi, Lord Jacobovitis (sp?) - he said this: "We live in a most selfish age, whatever we want we must have. Today, every desire exists for one purpose only and that is to be gratified. But the purpose and the person who pursues happiness" - listen to this - "will never, ever reach it". This is a religious leader, a past religious leader of Judaism, and he says within one of our national newspapers that the person who pursues happiness, through whatever means that they use - and if they fall into foul and they believe the philosophy of our day that 'Whatever thy hand finds to do in sin, do it with all thy might' - even when they gratify every desire and lust that they have, he says they will never find true happiness.

Why is this? Forgetting about Christianity this morning, just for a moment, and looking out into the wider world today, why is it that true, lasting, satisfying happiness is something that is so elusive?

I want us to think about a man called Solomon for a moment. And as we look into the Old Testament scriptures, we find there the book of Ecclesiastes - and although I've said let's suspend our Christian mind for a moment and think of it in terms of the world, that is why - exactly why - I want you to turn to Ecclesiastes. I want you to look at this man who, at this point when he wrote this book, was far away from God. In fact this whole book, if you like, was a quest, a crusade, a journey, an adventure for this man's happiness. Solomon went into every sin that you could possibly imagine. Solomon was a brilliant administrator, he was an able politician, he was a shrewd military commander and leader, he was a knowledgeable naturalist, he was a prolific lyricist - he wrote over 1,000 songs and 3,000 proverbs. He was the wealthiest king that almost ever lived, he had 1,400 chariots, he had 12,000 horses, his annual income was 23 metric tonnes of gold - per year! This man had a rampant libido, this man knew what a sex drive was - he had 700 wives, he had 300 concubines. But this man - if you turn to it in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 and verses 10 and 11, he says these awful words - Ecclesiastes [chapter] 2 verses 10 and 11: "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun". Now what's he saying? He's saying simply this: 'I've tried everything! I've tried every avenue that the world, that the devil himself and my own body can open - I've tried it all. But under the sun' - this great man of wisdom, the wisest man that ever lived apart from the Lord Himself, said that - 'under the sun there is no lasting happiness in anything'.

Isn't that tragic? Isn't that a cry of despair - and is that not the cry of our age today? There was a book written in 1931 by Aldus Huxley, you might have heard about it? It was entitled 'The Brave New World'. And in that novel, Aldus Huxley, he predicted and looked into the future about an age that was filled with pop culture. There were 'drug induced good feelings' that everyone had, there was 'free love' galore, there was unending entertainment and technological fixes to starve off any negative thoughts that would come in day-by-day. But as you read this book - and you may be abhorred by it, and you may think 'What an awful book to read' - but as you read this book, you find that this man Huxley was extremely pessimistic. And as he wrote this book about a society, about a generation that had everything that they wanted, who could delve into every medium and area that they pleased - he was so pessimistic, because he found at the conclusion of his book that all it brought was misery. Isn't that remarkable?

That's what the Lord Jesus Christ said. That what He said in Luke chapter 12 and verse 15 - that the consistency of life, and the meaning of life, and the importance of life, and the satisfaction of life is not to be found in things. 'It consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesses' - it can't be brought to you through externals, it can't be brought through feelings, it can't be brought through medicine, it can't be brought through alcohol, through relationships, it can't be brought through intellect. Happiness - true joy, true meaning, satisfaction - cannot be brought from without to within, it just does not happen.

Am I saying, today, that happiness cannot be achieved? That's not quite what I'm saying, but what I am saying is that physical things cannot touch the soul. In fact external things, things on the outside are only discomfort to the soul. In Ecclesiastes [chapter] 5 and verse 13 Solomon went on to say: "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt". The most terrible thing, almost, that I have seen - as I have looked for joy, as I have looked for happiness, as I have delved into everything - is that external things do not even bring joy, but they bring sorrow and misery!

Thomas Watson, the puritan, said this: "The things of this world will no more keep out trouble of spirit than a piece of paper will stop a bullet. Worldly delights are winged, they have wings and they are here for a time and for a moment, and they fly away", he goes on to say, "To look for blessing in things external is to seek the living among the dead. As the angel told Mary concerning Christ, 'He is not here, He is risen', so may I say blessedness is not here, it is risen - it is in a higher region". Now as we, in the weeks that lie ahead look into the beatitudes and look into all of them individually, and together corporately, the whole message and gamut of truth is the Lord Jesus Christ saying in one sentence, 'Happiness cannot be found in externals'.

What is 'blessedness'? This is this word that I want us to concentrate on today before we enter into the intricacies of the beatitudes. What is this word that the Lord Jesus Christ is saying? Some believe it is happiness. What does the word 'happiness' mean? Well, you might say, well it means joy, it means a spring in your step, a smile on your face - it means everything's going your way. But the middle-English word 'happiness', if you break it down, it is 'hap-ness, hap-ness'. You've heard of 'mishaps', and a 'hap' simply, in olden-day English, was something that happened by chance. Something that came along your way by chance, circumstance, external things that blow you one way or pull you the other way, pressures of life that come upon you. In other words happiness is affected and 'effected' by the way we feel.

'Beatitudes' is a Latin word, it simply means 'joy', 'blessedness', 'beatis' (sp?) - Latin for 'blessed', for 'joyous'. So is there a difference, this morning, between happiness - between something that happens because of externalities, circumstances that come across our path - and what is this 'blessedness'? The Greek word for 'blessedness' in this passage, and throughout the whole passage, is the word 'makarios, makarios' (sp?). The isle of Cyprus is a beautiful island, it is an island that Barbara and myself visited this year, it is an island that the ancients believed was so idyllic and like paradise, that they didn't need to go to Greece, they didn't need to cross the Mediterranean or the Aegean Sea to find anything else - it had absolutely everything within it. It was self-sufficient, there was fruit within it, you had the sea for the ports, you had everything within it - you had iron underneath it, there was even gold at some parts in it. And they felt that there they had absolutely everything, so much so that someone christened it 'Hay Makaria' (sp?), 'Blessed Island' - the blessed island. Homer, the great philosopher, he used this word 'makarios' of the gods - the Greek gods - and he used it to describe the fact that they were self-sufficient, that they had within themselves an inner state that was unaffected by the world of men, who were subject to poverty, to weakness and to death. This blessedness, this 'makarios' was above all this, it was unaffected by the wind of change of life, and feelings of circumstance, and 'hap-ness' that comes upon us day by day.

Some modern translations have translated this word 'happy'. 'Happy' are the poor in spirit. 'Happy' are those who mourn. 'Happy' are those who are empty, who are hungry, for they shall be filled. But let me say today that this word does not mean 'happy', this word means 'blessed'. What is blessed? What does it mean to be blessed? Well, you could be happy today, and sure if you're blessed today, and if you're in the Lord, and if you're living and walking in the light of the Lord, and have the joy of the Lord - of course you can be happy. But you could be happy here today, and not blessed of the Lord. There's a difference. This word 'blessed' - do you know what it really means? It simply means this: God's approval on your life. God's approval on your life - that if you follow these instructions given within the Beatitudes, God will smile on you, God will approve you. It's not something that is affected [by] how you feel, it's not something about if you feel poor, well then you'll feel that you're approved with God - it's not something like that, but it is stating what you are before God. Not how you feel, but what God thinks of you - there's a vast difference.

Maybe you're here today and you've fallen into sin in the past week, in the past months you've done things that you thought you would have never done, and you've gone down avenues that you thought were closed off because of the grace of God, and you've found your hands doing things that they shouldn't, or your thoughts thinking things that were abhorrent to you. You're sitting here [and] maybe you can't even go to the Breaking of Bread because that stain is on your mind and your conscience. Listen: the blessedness that is in

Christ and God has got nothing to do with your feelings - it's what God thinks of you. You may be depressed today, you may be downhearted, circumstances, illness, perplexity in marriage or in family relationships or in business. All of those things can come in and we can be downhearted, and we believe the lie of the devil that the Christian should never be downhearted or depressed, that he should be walking with a smile always on his face - and you think: 'I am not worthy, am I really living this Christian life that is to be lived?' Listen! God is not interested in your feelings, but He is interested in the way He thinks and sees you.

This word 'blessed' [could be] put like this: it is the applause of heaven, it is the approval of God upon your life. Now of course believers are already blessed, if you look at Psalm 32 and verse 1 you see there that every believer is blessed because his transgression has been forgiven, his sin has been blotted out. Psalm 1, the believer, we also see, is blessed if he walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. If he lives a holy, sanctified life after God, he will be blessed. But as we look at this passage of Scripture, we need to ask ourselves today: Whose approval do we look for? Do we look for God's approval, or do we look for our business partner's approval, our friend's approval, our colleague's approval? Do we look for our church's, our elder's, our pastor's, our youth leader's, our teacher's approval? Are we only satisfied when we get the praise of men, the approval of men, or we get into a circle where we get a pat on the back and we feel that we have reached the goal, or would we rather have the approval of God?

The approval of God can sometimes mean that we lose the approval of men. It can sometimes mean, as the Lord Jesus Christ said, that even our very kith and kin, the nearest and dearest to us, our husbands and wives, our son and daughter, father and mother, our very homestead - that even that place can find our disapproval and we have to leave it! Whose approval do we seek? Now this is serious - this is a magnitude question that we must grapple with, that we must deal with: Are we men-pleasers or are we God-pleasers? Do we do what God tells us and God shows us, or do we do what we feel will be approved by those around us? Do we fit into their mould? Do we use the same language? Do we imbibe the same doctrine? Do we listen to everything that is shovelled from the pulpit, and we swallow it because it's truth, because the pastor said it, or the elder said it? Do we look for that approval from others, but we don't look to God for it? We don't strive for that approval that comes from heaven, the smile of God, the applause of God, the applause of heaven that may only be given when God sees what others do not see.

Have I hit the nail on the head? Is that what the Lord Jesus Christ was getting at with the Pharisees, and the Scribes, and the Sadducees? Who wanted to pray on the street corners and be seen of men, who wanted to blow the trumpet when they were giving money to the poor, who wanted everybody to see their long beard, their sackcloth and ashes showing that they were fasting - is that what the Lord was getting at? He is saying go into your closet, and the God who sees in secret will reward you openly. What is blessedness? Blessedness is not simply happiness - blessedness is the approval of God Almighty. Do you have it?

But secondly: How can you be blessed? How can you be blessed? How can you have that approval? The basic message of the sermon on the mount and the beatitudes is simply this, as I've said: that happiness, God's approval, God's blessedness can never be found in externals. I want you to think for a moment of the four groups that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to. First of all there were the Pharisees, then there were the Sadducees, then there was a group called the Essenes and then there were the Zealots. Now to put it down to simple terms the Pharisees were the legalists - they were the ones who lived by the letter of the law, who did everything right, who had all their i's dotted and t's crossed. And these, effectively, were men who looked to the past - 'Our forefathers, have we not father Abraham as our father, the prophets, the patriarchs? They are our fathers, they are our heritage, that's what we have to follow, we have to walk in their path and keep all the rules right.' - in other words they wanted to go back. The Pharisees. Then there were the Sadducees and, if you like, they were the liberals. They lived for the present - they said, whatever society needs today, whatever society is able to believe in and grasp in, well we reject the supernatural things and we'll grasp

what intellectual reason tells us. So they threw out the resurrection. The Lord was speaking to the Pharisees, the legalists, the ones who wanted to go back. He was speaking to the Sadducees, the liberals, the ones who wanted to go ahead and push forward no matter what the cost, and what doctrines, and what gospel they diluted. Then there were the Essenes, these were the isolationists. What they did was they put on sackcloth and ashes, went out to a monastery in the desert, in the wilderness and worshipped God and cut themselves off from the world. They didn't want sin to encroach within their community, and they believed that through geography that they could sanctify themselves, and make them[selves] more pure before God. They wanted to go out. And then there are the Zealots, they wanted to take up arms. They were the social activists, the politicists, they looked to the future, they were the reactionaries, they were the ones who were antiestablishment - and they wanted to go against and take the kingdom of God by force.

What a band of people the Lord spoke to. Do you want to know something today...it's the same band of people that He speaks to. Those who want to dwell in the past, go back, those who want to dilute the gospel and gospel truth to make it appealing to those around. There are those who want to cut themselves off and build four walls and a roof and keep truth, and what happens is they die in the very centre of it! And then there are the zealots - the zealots who want to go at it through politics, through reactionary faith. What's common about all of them? All of them were external faiths. They were all the outward, they all had a bit of truth - but none of them had the whole truth! Because the Lord Jesus Christ in the sermon on the mount and the beatitudes is saying to them: 'My kingdom is inside you! My kingdom is in your heart'. Is that not what He said to Pilate? 'My kingdom is not of this world. My kingdom is a life that is lived'. An inner-righteousness is what God wants and what Christ taught - not an outward confirmation.

That is what the Beatitudes is about. Did we not see the first week that we studied it, in chapter 5 and verse 20, that the Lord said: 'Except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, you will in no wise - no case - enter the kingdom of heaven.' What's He saying? 'Unless your righteous living and your holy life is more than simply on the outside...you'll die and you will go to hell'.

Friends, today, there are those in our gathering - young people especially - and they've grown up in Christian homes, and they're not saved. And they may be holding onto a profession that they made in their youth, when they prayed a sinner's prayer - and I'm not despising that today - or they asked the Lord Jesus into their heart, but today there is nothing of a poor spirit in them, they are not humble, they are not meek. They are not empty seeking to be filled with righteousness, but they're seeking to be filled with sin, they are not pure of heart, but they are dirty in heart because of the things that you are doing, maybe, today. Is that you? Is that the way that you are living? You're not being persecuted for your faith, but you're perhaps joining in with those who persecute those in the faith! And none of these fruits, none of these beatitudes are in your life at this moment in time - yet you hold onto a profession [made] years ago.

The Lord Jesus said in Luke 11 and verses 39 to 41, and I read the Williams translation: 'Now you Pharisees, you have the habit of cleansing the outside of your cups and dishes; but inside you yourselves are full of guilt and wickedness. You fools, did not the one who made the outside make the inside too? But dedicate once and for all your inner self, and at once you will have everything clean'. If you were getting water, out of your water tap, that was dirty - what would you go and do? Would you go and change the pipe? Of course you wouldn't! You would go and you would clean the cistern - and there's some people, no matter how hard they try like the Pharisees, keeping rules, no matter what they deny in their minds like the Sadducees, no matter how they cut themselves off from the world like the Essenes, no matter how much they shout, rant and rave and walk and do all that is right like the zealots - the water continues to be dirty! And they may be an evangelical that is not born again...are you? Do you have these attributes that we find within this passage of Scripture - do you? Listen to these words: the poor in spirit, they that mourn, they that are meek, they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, you're merciful to others, you are pure in heart, you're a peacemaker

- not a fighter, you're persecuted for righteousness' sake, you're reviled, you're slandered, you're called all manner of things falsely. Do you know what that is - to have God in the inside?

Blessedness, is found in all eight of the beatitudes - there're not some Christians that are meek, and some who mourn, and some that are pure in heart - but the Lord Jesus Christ says -- and this amazes me! He says that the child of God is to have all of these! As we examine ourselves, all these nine things that we read before us is the opposite that the world tells us. The exact opposite of everything they teach, believe, they put in the media, they indoctrinate our children with - it's the exact opposite! But you must be the opposite of the world if you are to please God. Someone put it like this: 'Jesus crept into the display window of life and changed all the tags around'.

Next week, God willing, we've finished our introduction - and thank you for bearing with me - we'll look at the first beatitude: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. Approved, accepted with God are the poor in spirit. Come along next week and hear the word of God.

Let us bow our heads. It could be that the Lord has brought someone here today, and they have been looking for their happiness and their satisfaction in the world. Maybe they've been looking for it in religion, they could even be a member of this church today, and they have been looking at legalism, liberalism, essenism - where they try and cut off the world - and they find that it doesn't make a difference in their life. Maybe they talk the talk, they attempt to walk the walk - but the life of God is not in their heart. Why don't you come to Him today? Don't bring anything in your hands to offer Him, but just cling to His cross.

Our Father we thank Thee for Thy word. We thank Thee for the image of the Lord Jesus Christ that is presented to us as we read these beatitudes. And the attitude that was in Him, ought to be the attitude that is in us. Lord we thank Thee that He has put the very law of God within our hearts. He has enabled us to live it by faith and by grace. Lord help each of us that are Thine today, to walk in that spirit, and to show forth that blessed approval of God with these attributes in our lives. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 3

"Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit"

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Matthew chapter 5 again, as we look at the Sermon of the Mount, at the introductory words of the Sermon of the Mount, where the Lord reveals to all those - His children, and to the world at large - what is called 'The Beatitudes'. The attitudes of the kingdom of God, the attitudes that we as believers, subjects of that kingdom, that we are to follow to live righteously. We spent two weeks in introduction - the first week we thought of the Preacher and His preaching, last Lord's Day morning we thought of the subject of 'blessedness'. What is blessedness? We saw that blessedness is not simply happiness, it's not simply being satisfied in body or soul, but it is the approval of God, the smile of God, the applause of heaven upon your life and upon mine.

Today we're going to look at the very first words that the Lord Jesus spoke in the Sermon of the Mount in verse 3, but we'll read the whole passage - and I hope, week after week as we read the whole passage together and as, I trust, you read it at home, that it may even be committed to memory, but more importantly committed to your heart. "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was sat down, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

Incidentally, there are two beatitudes that end with the clause 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. It is verse 3, the first beatitude, and verse 10, the eighth beatitude. That is called in language, a 'stylistic device' which indicates what is called 'inclusion'. In other words, everything between verse 3, the first beatitude, and the last beatitude, verse 10, are to be included in the subject of 'what is the kingdom of heaven'. So all eight beatitudes, 1 to 8 (or nine if you like) all of those make up what the kingdom of heaven really is.

"Blessed" - verse 11 - "are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil', or to 'fill up', 'For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven".

What is it to be poor in spirit? We're thinking of verse 3: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Is it the conviction within one's soul that you are of no worth, no value, that you are nothing? Is it the feeling of absence of self-worth and self-image within your life? Is it a spirit of shyness, backwardness? Is it lacking vitality, a gutlessness? Or could it even be - to be poor in spirit - to be unspiritual, to be lacking in spiritual things?

A young boy was once told by his father that he was worthless, that he meant nothing, that he was foolish, that he was stupid, that he couldn't do anything right. And continually he was told this at home, at school and in every part of his society and life, until as he grew up he believed that he was worthless. There are so many in our land, perhaps even in our Assembly today and they were told they were worthless, they were poor from an early age - is that what poor in spirit means? Is it the person who comes and says, 'Well, I'm not really good at anything. In fact, this thing that I'm doing - I'm not good at it, I only do it because I'm the only one willing to do it' - is it a showy humility? Is it like Charles Dickens' character in David Copperfield, Uriah Heep, who kept reminding everyone what a humble person he was? Is that what to be poor in spirit means?

Well, it's not to be of no value. For if the Lord Jesus Christ says to us today that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life', you are of utmost value to God. That can't be what it means. Neither can it mean an absence of self-worth, for the same reason, because God says that you are made in the image of God. Not only did Christ die for you, but God created you and put in you, somewhere, somehow, His own stamp and His own image. It can't mean shyness, because there are many people who are shy, who are backward, but they can be the proudest people that have walked upon God's earth - that can't be what it means. Is it lacking vitality, is it [gutlessness] or [lacking] spirituality? And sometimes we as Christians, and even the world at large, can get this idea that graciousness, or humility, or poverty of spirit is to be quiet, to be walked over, to be weak. Does it mean weak, walked over and quiet in this sense of poverty of spirit? Is it financial destitution? Is poverty of spirit having no money in your pocket? Does it mean being materially bankrupt and worthless, poverty? What does it mean? The point is this: it is poverty of spirit, it is poverty in the spirit.

What is it? I want us to look at three things that will describe and explain for us, I hope, from this beatitude what it means to be poor in spirit. First of all we're going to look at the word 'poverty', the word used here for 'poverty'. Then we're going to look at the world and poverty. Then finally we're going to look at wealth, the wealth of poverty.

So let's look first of all at the word for 'poverty' here. In verse 3 the word that is used in the original New Testament Greek is a word that means 'poverty, to cower, to cringe like a beggar'. In classical Greek usage it was used the same way, of someone who crouches, who bends, who is ashamed, who wretchedly begs for money or for worth. It means to live beggarly, it simply describes someone who cannot survive of themselves, someone who cannot be self-sufficient - but someone who does not simply ask, does not work, but begs outside of himself for worth, for money, for wealth. That is what the New Testament word means - it could be literally translated 'beggarly poor', 'Blessed are the beggarly poor, for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. And if you take this meaning of the word and you combine it with 'in spirit', 'poverty in spirit', what it is saying is: those who are poor in spirit are those who are blessed, are those who will have the kingdom of heaven.

You could translate it like this, look at the verse: 'Blessed are those who are so desperately poor in their spiritual resources that they realise that they must have help from outside sources, theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. What does poverty of spirit mean? Can you see it? Do you know what it simply means? It means this: bankruptcy within your soul. Cleaned out, not financially, not materially - although that may be the case, and God might have to bring some people to that extreme to show in a mirror, with the physical to the

spiritual, that their soul is like that, it's naked, it's poor - but what the writer here, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, is bringing across is that: those who are blessed, those who are approved in the eyes and the sight of God, are those who are bankrupt in their very spirit. I wonder have you ever contemplated that?

John Wesley describes it like this: 'He', or she, 'who has a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin, which he brought from his mothers womb, which overspreads his whole soul and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof' - someone who realises, in the sight of God and biblically speaking, what they are, and what they are more importantly in the sight of God. It is simply this: it is a recognition of personal, moral and spiritual unworthiness. Spiritually, morally, personally, socially, in every single realm that you can think of of the human life, that you're showing that you are in need of God. An excellent rendering of this verse (and I would advise you to take it down) is this: 'Blessed are those who realise that they have nothing within themselves to commend them to God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'.

Now I don't want to go on any further until we have grasped this thought, because this is deep, this is basic Christianity. These are the first words that the Lord Jesus Christ taught from this mountain, the Sermon on the Mount, but we could stop here and spend the rest of our lives delving into the spiritual depths of this truth: that the only person in this world, the only member in this church that will be blessed of God is the one who realises that they are nothing. Sinners under the wrath of a holy, righteous God - realising that from God, from the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, from the Holy Spirit, that we deserve absolutely nothing but His judgement, that we ought to plead nothing but hell. The idea is, as one of the psalmists who cries out: 'This poor man cried unto the Lord'. This bankrupt man, this loathsome man, this man filled outside, inside, with nothingness, with disdain, with spiritual bankruptcy and poverty cried unto the Lord. That is what to be poor in spirit means: to be bankrupt. To realise that here as you sit in the Iron Hall - whether you are saved or lost today, whether you have been found, whether you're blood-washed and blood-bought, whether you're saved, unsaved, born-again or not - to realise that as you sit spiritually, physically, morally, theologically, politically, socially, you have absolutely nothing to bring you to God!

I wonder has that realisation ever struck you? I wonder has it ever been brought to you how you have nothing, you have nothing that can bring you to God? And there could be someone here that is not saved and is still relying on themselves, or on their works, or on their church, or their national allegiance or something like that - but God is saying to you: 'All those things are good of themselves, but if you begin to equate them with the kingdom of heaven and getting there...no chance!'. You see, it's only those who realise that they can't get there that have any hope of getting there! Those who are poor in spirit.

That is the word for poverty, but I want you to see secondly what the world thinks of poverty. As we read these words, and even as the Lord preached these words in His own day, what was the world at large thinking when He said: 'The poor in spirit, they'll get to heaven'. What did He mean, when He said: 'If you want to be approved of God and accepted by God and have the smile and applause of God, you must be poor, you must be bankrupt'? What did they think in His day? What do they think in our day? Nothing much has changed. In their day and in our day the cry is: 'Assert yourself. Praise yourself. Learn to praise yourself and encourage yourself and build yourself up'. The beatitudes of today - in opposite - are this: 'Blessed are those who are always right. Blessed are those who are strong. Blessed is the man, the woman, the child who is rich. Blessed is the person that is satisfied within themselves. Blessed is the ruler. Blessed is the popular person'.

We said a few weeks ago that the beatitudes of the Lord Jesus Christ are the antithesis, the exact opposite, of everything that the world believes. And if you want to walk with Christ, you're going to walk right in the face of the world, you're going to go against the flow, you're going to do everything that seems abnormal to the generation in which we live. And for someone to say that 'Blessed are poor people in their spirits' was foolishness, He was a fool in their eyes for saying such a thing because in those days, and in our day today, all answers to life, all blessedness and approval anywhere is found within self. 'If you want to be blessed,

well you're going to have to find something good within yourself to think about, to realise that you have a niche in life, you have something to do, that you're here for a reason - and when you find that, then you'll be happy and then you'll be blessed. You'll be blessed within yourself with love, with sensuousness, with feelings that you can bring on through drug abuse, or through sexual immorality or through something like that from the outside, that you can make yourself within feel a little bit better'. But the doctrine of this world and the doctrine of the world, and even the church of that day - and, sadly, some churches today - is this: that it can be found in self.

This, as in the Lord Jesus Christ's day, is the narcissian age. If you remember, Narcissus, there's a legend told about him: he was in love but a tragedy fell upon him, because one day as he was walking around a beautiful garden he looked into a pond that looked just like a mirror, it was so still. And in that pond he saw a reflection, and at that moment he fell in love with it - of course, he fell in love with himself. The 20th-century, that we are going out of, and the 21st century that we are entering, I believe is the epitome of a narcissian age - men will be lovers of themselves, they will look for happiness, they will look for blessedness, they will look for approval with one another and from within.

You need to be poor in spirit in order to be, first of all: blessed; secondly: saved; and thirdly: matured - the Lord indicates that in other passages within the Scriptures. If we look at the first, in order to be blessed - and we saw last week that 'blessing' means 'approval' - and if you want God's approval you need to be poor in your spirit. I want to use David, King David, as an example of this. If you turn to 1 Samuel, chapter 18 and verse 18 - now this is the reason why David was chosen of God, one of the reasons why he was chosen by God for the kingship. 1 Samuel 18 and verse 18: 'David said unto Saul, Who am I? And what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king?'. Later we see in reference, in 2 Samuel 7 and 18, in reference to his actual kingship he asked the question: 'Who am I? Who is my family? What is my history? What have I that should commend me to the throne and to the royalty of Israel?' - David asked the question.

If you look at Judges 6 and verse 15 you see Gideon, and you remember that Gideon was raised up of God and he took 300 men alone - he wanted to take more, but God said 'No' - 300 men and they defeated the enemy. But before God raised him up for this victory he said these words in verse 15 of chapter 6: 'He said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house' - 'I come from a poor tribe in Manasseh. I am the least in my father's house, I am the runt of the family'. But God chose to lift the poor one, to lift the weak one, to use him - because it's that way and it's that road that we will have blessing in the church of God and in our personal souls and spirits. Didn't the woman who bore the Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed virgin, did she not rejoice in God her Saviour? She rejoiced, not in her ability to have this child, not in God's grace to shine upon her and to pick her out of all the woman in Judah that she - remember every young woman of her age was just asking, was just praying to have the privilege of delivering Messiah into the world - but when she was told, she didn't run to the press, she didn't shout it from the rooftops, she didn't tell those in her assembly, but unlike us she rejoiced in God her Saviour...because she realised that blessedness comes through poverty of spirit.

You need it to be blessed, you need it to be saved. You see, you will never be saved, you can't be saved without it! The Lord Jesus made that so clear on so many occasions, and there are so many people across our land at this very moment and they believe that they are being commended to God for some other reason within themselves. Very few have blessed emptiness, empty within, realising that they have nothing to bring them or to commend them to God. And - oh yes - faith saves them as Ephesians 2:8 and 9 say, that: '...by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves' - of course faith saves them, but poverty of spirit is the posture of faith. You'll not go to the doctor - it's very simple but it's true - you'll not go to the doctor if you don't realise there's something wrong, if you don't realise that you are lacking in some way, that you're out of breath a little, or you've a limp, or you've a pain or a sore head - if you don't have that, you won't go.

And in the same way if you don't realise your sin and your neediness before God, of having God in your life, you will never go to Christ for salvation - you're too proud to do it!

You need it to be blessed, you need it to be saved and you need it to be mature. You see the first beatitude, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', if you ever outgrow that first beatitude you've outgrown Christianity. You don't get past it and you qualify, and you're promoted to number two beatitude - it doesn't work like that, you have to carry it with you. You see, you - if you want to grow, if you want to mature on the Christian pathway - you must be led along the rest of the way in humility, in poverty of spirit and in a knowledge and acknowledgement of spiritual bankruptcy before God. Look at Revelation chapter 3, we see in the book of Revelation the two differences, the two different approaches to this subject. We have in Revelation 3 and verse 17 the Laodicean church, and the Lord is speaking to the churches, He's talking to His own churches, describing what He thinks of them - imagine that! What would He think of us today? What would He think of you, if He was personally describing you? He says in verse 17: 'Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see' - 'See thyself as thou art!'. They thought they were rich, it was the ones who thought they were rich who were poor. Chapter 2 and verse 9, the other extreme - and this is the blessed extreme - to the church at Smyrna He says, 'I'm describing you, church of Smyrna: I know thy works, and tribulation', the trial, 'and poverty, but thou art rich'. They had poverty, but their poverty made them rich.

The world thinks it idiotic, but who cares? - Because the world never got it right yet! But we know that it is blessed wisdom. We've seen the word for poverty, we've seen what the world thinks of poverty, but I want to finally look at the wealth of poverty. 'Blessed', that means 'rich', rich in the sense of 'approved by God', to have God's smile and approval upon your life - you will have it when you're poor in your spirit, and then you will enter the kingdom of God. Now I want you to notice that this is an emphatic phrase, that simply means that it means that there is no one upon the earth or out of earth that can have it - only a poor person in spirit, it's emphatic. Only the poor in spirit, only them - all other extremes, all others excepted, all other religions or faiths or beliefs - what He is saying here is that it's only those who realise their bankruptcy and their nothingness before God that will be commended to God. And if you're here today, right now, and you know that there's something that you believe within yourself can bring you to God, you can't get there. You'll never get there and you'll never be in heaven. You see, it's our weakness that is the reservoir for God's power. It is our inadequacy that is the place for His adequacy, our poverty that is exchanged for His riches. It is our timidity that gives way for His confidence and His authority, and ultimately it is our emptiness and nothingness that gives way for His fullness.

Is that not what Paul said? For God said to him, and he said to God three times: 'Will You take this thorn away from me? This thorn in my flesh, this thing that has come as a messenger of Satan to buffet me, take it away!' - and God said: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness'. I wonder is God saying that to someone here today? You've gone through something, you're about to go through something and you're terrified, you feel weak, you feel nothing - realise that that feeling that you have of poverty and emptiness before God, covet it, hold it, and realise that you're blessed of God because of it only if you rely upon Him in it. This is the message of the Sermon on the Mount - we're going to repeat it eight, nine times perhaps, but I want it to get into my head and into yours - that no-one can be saved or approved by God in their life if they believe that something within them, or something without of them, can bring them to God.

In Luke 18 verses 10 to 14 we read an account of the publican and the Pharisee, and you know it well. The Pharisee went up to the temple and so did the publican, and the publican was a scoundrel in his day. A holy

man and a sinful man, they both go up to the temple and the Pharisee stands up before God and he cries: 'I thank thee, that I am not as other men' - and he went through a whole list of how he fasted, how he went to the temple to pray, how he did his alms, and dear knows what else the writer has left out that he did say! And this poor soul got up and bowed his head in shame before God and said: 'God be merciful unto me a sinner' - and he was the one who was justified. Could we be saying today: 'Two men went into the church to pray. One was a regular member and one was an outsider. The member stood and prayed, 'I thank Thee that I am not as other denominations, as other vile sinners. I go to the Bible study, I go to the prayer meeting, I give my offering faithfully, I am a fundamental Ulster evangelical dispensational protestant' - do we say that? These things are not wrong, don't get me wrong today - we must believe and we must have our beliefs, and believe them boldly - but do we take pride in them? Or do we have that blessed poverty of spirit that we realise, as Spurgeon said, that the way to rise in the kingdom of God is to sink within ourselves and before others?

When I started Bible College a friend of mine said this to me - and I have failed living it, I'll admit it - but he said this: 'David, never climb up the ladder, climb down'. Don't climb up! Don't seek for that glory, but seek for the poverty! Realise, can you say as a believer or as an unbeliever that 'The first link between my soul and Christ is not my goodness but my badness, not my merit but my misery, not my standing but my falling'? Can you say: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, nothing. Simply to Thy cross I cling - not even my doctrine, but just the cross. Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee in grace. Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me Saviour or I die'?

I want us quickly - and I know I've gone over our time a little, but look at this: 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 13 - and if you're missing your lunch, don't worry about it, this can be your lunch now! 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 13, I want you to see this, Paul the apostle - he says this is the secret: 'Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day' - who's he talking about? The filth of the world - if someone came up to you, or was in the prayer meeting and you heard them praying 'the filth of the world' you'd think they were describing the sin of the world, or perhaps the sinners of the world. But Paul uses this word and that's not what he's describing as filth of the world, or offscouring, he's describing himself! He reckons himself as the filth of the world - if I can say it, the scum of the world - why? Because he is willing to be reckoned a fool for Christ, because he reckons himself nothing, because he's poor in spirit.

Leonard Ravenhill said: 'This is a man who has no ambitions, and therefore he has nothing to be jealous about. This is a man who has no reputation, like the Lord Jesus Christ himself - bless His name - therefore he has nothing to fight about. This man has no possessions, so he has nothing to worry about. He has no rights, therefore he suffers any wrongs. He's already dead, therefore no-one can kill him'. My friend, this is beautiful: he is the scum of the world for Christ. How do you get it? How do you get it? How do you obtain this blessed poverty? W.P. Nicholson tells the story of how he was freed from public opinion. He said that it was down in his home town of Bangor and there was the Salvation Army, they were walking down the street - only four of them - he was newly saved and, horror of horrors, they asked him to join them. There was one man - he was the nitwit, he called him, of the town - he was dressed in a red jumper that stood out, and it had written on it 'Freed from public opinion'. And at that moment in time when he joined that band, he didn't care what men thought of him, only what Christ thought of him. He was free, he was poor in spirit.

How do you get it? Here's an exercise: the way you get it - think about this - go out onto a street on a Friday night, pick up a drunk man, take him to your home, wash him down, give him a meal, tell him of Christ - that's poverty of spirit. You need to accept God's estimation of you. You need to yield to Him daily. You need to look at Christ and not yourself. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Our Father, help us to say like Paul 'God forbid that we should boast save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto us and we unto the world'. Lord, help us to follow in His footsteps. We've only looked at the first beatitude, we need go no further because it just destroys us, it shows us for what we are. Help us to see that, and help us to acknowledge our bankruptcy, but Lord help us also to look to Christ and see what we can be in Him. Bless Thy word to our hearts we pray, and bless us as we go, in Jesus name. Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 4

"Blessed Are They That Mourn"

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Matthew chapter 5 again, Matthew chapter 5 - and we've been looking at the beatitudes of the Lord Jesus Christ, His opening words of His great Sermon on the Mount. We spent our first week looking at the Preacher and His preaching, and then the second week we thought of this little word 'blessedness' that is repeated so often, what it meant. And it simply meant 'to be approved of God', 'to have God's smile', 'to have the applause of heaven' - not simply happiness, because happiness is affected by the things outside of us, our circumstances - but this approval of God is something that transcends simple happiness and externalities of circumstance. Blessedness is to have God's hand resting upon you, God's smile and approval in your life. Then last week we began looking at the first beatitude, verse 3, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'.

Let's begin reading again at verse 1: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was sat down, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil", or to 'fill them up', "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case" - no way - "enter into the kingdom of heaven".

Let us pray: Our dear Father, we thank Thee for Thy truth, and we know that Thy word is truth, that it has power. We would ask as we read it that the Holy Spirit of the Living God may fall afresh on us, in Jesus name. Amen.

We're looking at verse 4, the second beatitude, verse 4: 'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted'. Perhaps you could translate it like this, it sounds paradoxical, it sounds contradictory, but really what it's saying in everyday terms is this: 'Happy are the unhappy. Happy are the sad'. What a paradox that is! They seem absolute opposites, that someone who is mournful should be comforted, or should be happy, should be joyful, should have satisfaction within them from being mournful, from being sad, from being

downhearted. How could this be? It's an absolute paradox. Someone has defined the word 'paradox' as this: 'A paradox is truth standing on its head calling for attention'. That's exactly what this is - the Lord Jesus Christ, in verse 4, is saying: 'Approved, blessed, accepted with God are they who mourn, for they shall be happy, they shall be comforted, they shall be satisfied'.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said: 'Mournfulness is a rare herb'. It's an endangered species, it is something that you don't come across often in these days that we live in - why is that? Well, first of all - if you look at verse 3 - you will see that, as we said last week, all the beatitudes relate to one another. There is almost like a knock-on effect as we read them: verse 3 leads to verse 4, verse 4 leads to verse 5, and so on. None of them are exemplary, we must take them all, we must believe them all, we must practise them all, we must look for them all in our lives - but there is seemingly a progression as we look from one verse to another. You see, in verse 3 - look at it: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' - we saw last week that to be poor in spirit was to be humble, and to be humble because you have been humbled by a vision of your own sinfulness before God.

That great hymn, 'Rock of Ages', we sang it twice - and that verse that says: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling' - there is nothing that I can bring to God that can commend me to Him, nothing that I have that can make me acceptable and bring me to heaven. 'Simply to Thy cross', His work on the cross, 'I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee in grace. Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me Saviour or I die!'. It's a knowledge - if you like, the first beatitude, number one beatitude in verse 3, is intellectual - it's knowing your sin, coming to a knowledge of it and a realisation of it. But verse 4, number two beatitude, is emotional - it is the effect of what happens to your soul and your spirit when you realise that you're a sinner. When you have the intellectual knowledge the emotional experience kicks in and not only do you know that you're a beggar in the sight of God, but you begin to feel like one. That's the difference. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' - intellectual. 'Blessed are they that mourn' - emotional.

What a devastating experience this is. I want you to notice that the first words that the Lord Jesus Christ uttered, almost, in His public ministry as we see Him here in the Sermon of the Mount - the first words that He spoke were not 'Peace! Peace!'. They were not particularly comforting words, but - as He enters into this great sermon describing what the nation of Israel needed to do if they were to come back to God - they are violent words, they are destructive words, they are words that cut to the quick, that deal a deathly blow to any form of self-reliance, any form of self-righteousness, anything that would say: 'In us, myself in my hands I bring, and then to Thy cross I cling'.

I want you to see the devastating nature of these words. It's unbelievable to think that we - for us as prideful human beings - that we can't come to God by ourselves. You see, that knocks it - that's why the world around us doesn't like it, because it means that I can't do anything to be saved. People don't like that. To know it is one thing, but when the Holy Spirit enters - not just into your mind, but into your heart - and brings to you the emotions that you cannot come to God - the feelings of your rottenness, of your beggarliness and your sinfulness before the face of a holy God - it is destroying! You see, it needs to be destroying - because if there was anything left of you or I as we came to God for salvation, we wouldn't be saved. All of self, all of pride, all of self-reliance and self-righteousness, all of the things that we think are acceptable, God has to destroy them - it's sad that He has to do it, but He has to.

What are attitudes today? We've seen over the past weeks that the attitudes of the Lord, and the philosophies and the doctrine that He is presenting here, is the absolute antithesis to everything that society believes today. If you went out into the street and you got the microphone in the open air and you shouted: 'Blessed, happy are they that are unhappy', they would lock you up! It doesn't make sense, it doesn't seem to be logical, it doesn't fit in with our way of life, our thought pattern, our system of reason and logic. You see, we in our society today - and especially in our society - to be unhappy is not in vogue. It's a pleasure-man society, it's a

society that wishes to bring everything to them to satisfy their fleshly lusts. No matter what it is, good time is the goal - as long as you have a good time, no matter whether it's sin, no matter whether you break the law, as long as it gives you a buzz, well, then it's OK.

Moral, immoral, amoral man today - no morals at all - is building around himself this structure, to be appeased and appealed to by every maximum entertainment and amusement, in an attempt to make his life one big party. Is that not true? Is it not true that the next step, and stage, and goal that every person strives to is the next high that they can have? And if they can't find that high in their own personal lives, in their own lives and their family as it is in the moment, they have to take substances with which to bring, falsely, that high within their life and their mind, and to make them feel better than they really are. What a sad society we live in - but to be mournful, to be unhappy, to be sad is to be a wet blanket. At any cost the world will try and attempt to avoid unhappiness - and when the world should be, and is meant to be, crying they are laughing! And when they ought to be laughing and rejoicing they are crying.

I want to speak to the young people, just for a moment, before we look and expound this verse, there's something that bothers me. As I was (or am!) a young person, as I grew up through the Young People's Fellowship and through University and school and so forth, I found a quality within young people - there are many good qualities within them, and sometimes we don't praise them enough - but there was one quality (and it's not particularly their fault, because they have grown up within a generation and a society that has depicted this to be the way to be). It's simply this: that everything must be laughed at, everything! Everything must be made a joke of, everything must be poked fun at. There is nothing sacred, there are not things that are to be sad - there are things that we are to express sorrow and sadness and mourning about. Look at the television: I guarantee you that if you turn Channel 4 on at about eleven o'clock at night after an atrocity, they would be poking fun at it - I've seen it happen. Taking things that are serious, loss of life, great catastrophes, and the vogue of today is to laugh at things that we should weep at, and to weep at the things that we ought to laugh at!

It has even infiltrated the church of Jesus Christ, that people laugh at spiritual things - even within the sanctuary we are looking for a continual buzz, a feeling of happiness, of pleasure. We feel pressure that we always have to be happy if we're a Christian, we have to wear the plastic smile! Some of us feel such pressure - some seeming 'defenders of the faith', leading evangelicals in our world today, will not preach sin or guilt because it makes people in the pew feel uncomfortable. 'We don't want to feel uncomfortable, we don't want to feel unhappy, we don't want to mourn, we don't want to be sad - tell us something that makes us happy, tell us something that changes our emotions!'. Let me tell you would Jesus said: 'If you don't mourn for your sin, and if you're not poor in spirit, and if you don't feel sad, you'll never be saved'. You will never be saved! Because in order to be saved you must see your sin, and if seeing your sin doesn't make you sad, you haven't seen it!

Neil Postman - he's not a believer, but he has written a book and the title explains the whole book that he has written, do you know what it's called? 'Amusing Ourselves To Death' - amusing ourselves to death, we laugh at the things we should weep over, don't we? And we weep at the things we should laugh at. There was a train crash a few years ago across the water, and it was televised and it showed after this crash the carnage that there was. It showed you the Fire Brigade and the ambulances coming to rescue the people, and there was a shot of a mother that was sitting in her passenger seat, strapped in with a little child in her arms, and the mother was dead. But the child was still alive, and the rescue men came in and they lifted the child and - think of this - as they lifted the child, the child began to laugh and giggle! But then, as they lifted her, they found they couldn't lift her because she had chocolate in both of her hands, and they took the chocolate out of her hands - and when they took it out of her hands she began to squeal and wail. Is that not like us? Is that not like human nature? At the tragedies of this spiritual world that we live in, we laugh! We can't see it! We're blinded by it! But immediately our little candy bar is taken away from us - whether it be health,

whether it be wealth, whether it be status - whatever it may be, we wail and we cry! But the Lord Jesus Christ said this: 'Blessed are the mournful, for they shall be comforted'.

I want us to look, first of all, at what mournfulness is not, and then we're going to look at what it is, and then we're just simply going to look at the phrase 'they shall be comforted'. Let's look at what it is not. Mournfulness is not Christians being perpetually morose, not downtrodden, downhearted, boring, depressing Christians that trip over their faces! It is not being full of self-pity, weeping continually - that is not what the Lord Jesus Christ is talking about. First of all, this blessed mournfulness is not cheerlessness - not cheerlessness. Robert Louis Stevenson, many of you know him, the author, he wrote this - listen to this: 'I've been to church today and I'm not depressed'. Because of Christians that he had experienced in his life he thought you had to be depressed, you had to have a long face, you had to be boring, dull, morbid to go to the place of God to worship - and let me ask: can you blame him? It's like the little girl that was walking in the country with her mother, and she pointed over to a horse and she said: 'That horse must be a Christian, look at the long face on it!'. And sometimes we are like that - now that is not mournfulness that the Lord Jesus Christ is talking about, that is miserableness.

In Proverbs chapter 17 and verse 22 we have wise words from Solomon where he says this: 'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones'. And it is true that a laugh - there's nothing wrong with a laugh in the right place, and there is a time to laugh and a time to cry - there's nothing wrong with a smile on your face, and if you're saved today and there's not a smile on your face, something's missing. But Oswald Saunders goes on to say - and here's a warning for us all - that we have already, in the Christian church, allowed too much that is good to be lost to the church, we've cast too many pearls before swine, and the church is in a bad way when it banishes laughter from the sanctuary and leaves it to the cabaret, the nightclub and the toast-maker. We need to be happy, and mournfulness is not cheerlessness.

But secondly, look at this: mourning, neither, is mourning about the difficulties within our lives. Think about it: the Bible never says that mourning in itself is a blessed state. In fact, mourning within the word of God, at times, is cursed of God. You remember Amnon? You remember how he lusted after his half-sister Tamar, and it said that because he couldn't have her - because it was against the law, it was against the law of nature and his family, and it was against God, it was a sin - but it says that he mourned because he couldn't have her. That's not good. It says that Ahab mourned because he couldn't get his hands on Naboth's vineyard. He coveted, he lusted after it and that wasn't good either - so mourning is not mourning over the difficulties of life.

But thirdly, look at this: nor is mourning - in this context - bereavement. Mourning is bereavement, but not here. So, what is it? There are nine words within the New Testament used for the word 'mourning', all of them are used, all the Greek words, nine of them, are used in the New Testament. But the word that is used in verse 4 is the strongest and most descriptive word that you can use. It's found in Genesis 37 verse 34, and if we had time we could turn to it, it describes Jacob's sorrow and mournfulness over his son Joseph who had died. You remember, his brothers took him and they cast him into a pit, and they took his beloved coat of many colours and they splattered it with blood, brought it back to his father and said: 'Your beloved son, he's dead now'. And it says that he mourned - and the word that is used is the most descriptive word. It's the word that's used in Mark chapter 16 and verse 10, where the women who had been to the tomb after the Lord Jesus had rose from the dead, they came back to the disciples and they told that He was risen - and they found them mourning and weeping, they had lost the Saviour! What mourning that was.

This is not simply cheerlessness, this is not simply difficulties in life, this is not only bereavement - because bereavement is a natural sorrow. These other mournings that we can have at times are unnatural, they are deeper than they ought to be, and we do weep about things that we ought to laugh in the face of - but this is spiritual sorrow. I want to illustrate it by turning to Psalm 32, Psalm 32 and if you look at verses 3 to 5 you

see here this godly sorrow, this spiritual sorrow. Psalm 32 and verses 3 to 5, and this is the way you feel - it is kicked out of your intellect and into your emotions, and when you keep silent your bones wax old through your groaning all-day long: 'For day and night [God's] hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer'. That's the way you feel, and the only happiness, the only comfort, the only relief that you can have is found in verse 5: 'I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin' - and the result is, you're comforted, verses 1 and 2: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord does not credit iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile.

Do you know what this is? And I'm speaking as much to Christians now as I am to anyone here that's not saved. This is ceasing from rationalising your sin, this is - in your life - calling sin sin, calling it what it is, admitting what it is and letting the horrors, the desolation, the degradation of sin penetrate right into our very soul until we weep and mourn about it! Have you ever done that? It was Cranmer - Archbishop Cranmer - when he wrote the prayer book in 1662, and he wrote the Holy Communion part to put into the lips of church people words to say as they broke bread, was he exaggerating when he said: 'We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness'? Is that too strong a word? 'Bewail'? That is mournfulness.

It says of John Bradford, that was burned at stake by the papists in 1555, that scarcely a day passed in which he did not weep for his sin. Isn't that powerful? It says of David Brainerd, the great missionary in the 1500's to the American Indians, as he walked in the forest one evening and contemplated his sins and his depravity before God, that he felt that the very ground of the forest would open up and swallow him into hell! It says as he went back to the mission station he could hardly show his face in case the other missionaries knew what had happened to him, or saw the look of sinful shame upon his face. Spurgeon said: 'The best of men are men at best, and apart' - listen to this - 'apart from the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of divine grace, hell itself does not contain greater monsters than you and I might become!' I remember hearing about the old preacher Alan Redpath that stood on a platform and he said: 'As I stand here this evening I am capable of committing any sin under the sun' - that is realising how big a sinner you are! And it was Paul - in his late years, now, not after he had murdered Christians - but as he thought and contemplated what he was, that he could say that he was the chief of sinners! As believers, as unbelievers, do we see our sin? Do we see ourselves as we really are? Do you know what the old puritan called sin? 'The Devil's excrement' - that describes it wonderfully. Do we see ourselves like that? That this is all we are - but often, and it's not wrong to make much of the grace of God, but at times we make much of the grace of God and we make light of our own sinfulness before God.

I want to point you to the Man of Sorrow. It's interesting as we read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - the gospel record - that the Lord Jesus Christ is never recorded as laughing or smiling. Don't get me wrong - I'm not saying He didn't laugh or smile, I'm not saying He couldn't laugh or smile. But why do the gospel recorders, why does the Holy Spirit, not bring that thought to us? Simply because He wants Him to be described as the Man of Sorrows! He was hungry, He was tired, He was going to bear the sins of the world, He heard in His ears day by day blasphemy, profanity, He saw it with His very eyes - the One who could not look upon iniquity, He saw all those things in His very midst. He was thirsty, He was weeping, He was poor, He was angry, He was hungry - but chiefly, He mourned because of our sin and He mourned for a sinful, lost world. We see that in Luke 23, if you look at it quickly, Luke chapter 23 - and you remember the women were weeping for Him, can you imagine this? They were weeping for Him, the crucified Saviour - verse 28: 'But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children'. What a Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief.

Do we see the sorrow of our sin? Do we see what our sin did to Christ? Do we see it? Do you know some of the reasons why we don't see it? One: our love for sin. Let's be honest, put your hand up here if you don't love sin - you're a sinner, so you're bound to love sin! Love for sin stops us letting go. Two: despair. We may

think that we have sinned so much, or in such gravity, that God cannot forgive us - no! Thirdly: it could be conceit. 'I don't need to be forgiven. I don't need to turn from my sin, I'm not that bad! Why should I mourn about my life?' - self-righteousness. Four: presumption. 'The grace of God can cover my sin' - true...but if you talk like that you may have never seen the grace of God! Five: procrastination. Putting it off, putting it off, living with sin, continuing - as John says - in sin and not putting your sin under the blood of Christ. And six: frivolity. 'I don't care!'. Is that not why the great apostles kept emphasising sobriety within your walk with Christ? Realise the sinfulness, the awful sinfulness of sin!

Do you want to know how to mourn for your sin? Do you want to know? Meet with us at a quarter past ten on a Sunday morning - that's how. Look to the cross, look to a sinless, spotless Saviour suffering for sins that were not His own - Christ dying for you, being made a sacrifice for your sin - and if that doesn't break you, if that doesn't humble you, if that doesn't put your face and your life and your soul and your walk on its face before God in the dust, I don't know what will! Christina Rossetti put it like this - so often we can suffer from hardened hearts, can we? We were talking about sinners and hardened hearts last Sunday evening, but there's many of us have hardened hearts, many of us. Some of us no more than when we look upon the cross, we know it so well, we've heard about the blood so often, and we've heard about the sacrifice for sin, that it rolls off us like water off a duck's back. Listen how Christina Rossetti puts it:

'Am I a stone and not a sheep?
That I can stand, oh Christ, beneath Thy cross
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow loss,
And yet not weep?
Not so these women, loved,
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee.
Not so fallen Peter, weeping bitterly.
Not so the sun and moon, which hid their faces in the starless sky
A horror of great darkness at broad noon - I, only I.
Yet give not o'er, but seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock,
Greater than Moses - turn and look once more and smite a rock'.

If you look to the cross you shall be comforted. If you mourn for your sin, if you let it eat within you, you will be comforted - and what the comfort means, simply, is forgiveness. Your life will be changed, the Holy Spirit will enter in - and interestingly the word for 'comfort' is the root word, and has the same root as the word for the Holy Spirit, 'parakletos'. And 'parakletos' simply means 'to come aside', 'to come beside, arm in arm and to comfort you' - that's what the Holy Spirit does. If you mourn for your sin the Holy Spirit of God will come beside you, and comfort you, and take you all the way to the cross. You'll have forgiveness in the Holy Spirit and you'll have salvation, and your mourning will elevate you to Him. Christian and non-Christian, just like the prodigal - Luke chapter 15 and verse 18 - what did he say? 'When he came to himself, he said, I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, I have sinned in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son'. What is it to be comforted? As I close:

'Because the sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free.
For God, the just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me'.

Praise the Lord! Let us pray. Perhaps there is someone here that's not born-again, and you know what it is to feel the mournfulness of your sin and the emotion of a dying soul within yourself. Look to Him and be saved this morning. Lord, we say with the poet: 'Lord, bend this stiffnecked I, help me to bow the head and die, beholding Him on Calvary who bowed His head for me'. Lord, help us to be poor in spirit, but to mourn our

sin - and if we do we'll inherit the kingdom of heaven, and we'll be comforted by none other than the Holy Spirit of God in His blessed fullness in our lives. Bless us now as we part, for Christ's sake. Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 5

"Blessed Are The Meek"

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If you have a Bible with you, turn with me to Matthew's Gospel again and chapter 5, Matthew's Gospel chapter 5. We have been going through the Beatitudes, the opening words of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. We have dealt with the first and the second and now we're looking this morning at the third beatitude, that is found in verse 5 of chapter 5, but we'll read those verses, all of the verses of the Beatitudes.

"And seeing the multitudes," verse 1, "he went up into a mountain: and when he was sat down, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven".

We're looking at verse 5 of chapter 5: 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth'. We've looked at 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', 'Blessed are they that mourn', and now we're looking today at 'Blessed are the meek'.

We saw in the weeks previous, that all of these beatitudes are blessed paradoxes. Someone defined the word 'paradox' as 'truth standing on its head, shouting for attention'. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ uses these descriptions of what a Christian ought to be, of what a subject of the kingdom, the way they ought to live, the way Christ's Holy Spirit ought to abide in their lives. If they are saved, if they are members of the kingdom, these attributes of the beatitudes must be in their lives. But they're paradoxes, they're paradoxical in the sense that they are the antithesis of everything that the world around us believes and propagates. We remember that in the first beatitude where the Lord Jesus said, 'Blessed are the poor' - the world does not say that, the world says, 'Blessed are the rich'. The world does not say, 'Blessed are they that mourn', but the world says, 'Blessed are they that are happy and joyous all the time'.

And as we look at the third beatitude, 'Blessed are the meek', we see again this paradox of Christ staring us in the face. That was the crux of the Lord's teachings, wasn't it? The Lord Jesus seems to turn everything on its head. What did He say? Not blessed are the first, but rather the last shall be first. He said that it's better to give than to receive. He propagated dying rather than living, losing rather than finding. He said that the least in the kingdom of heaven would be better than the greatest down here on earth. He propagated being poor rather than being rich, it was weakness that He preached about not strength, it was serving rather than ruling. And of course we know that what the Lord Jesus taught in this passage was the exact opposite that enters into the heart of every man that is born into our world. It goes against all of the flow of humanistic philosophy that our world believes in.

William Henley put his beliefs in a verse like this:

'Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be,
For my unconquerable soul'.

Is that not the mind of most men today? 'We have an unconquerable soul. We are our own god, we are our own boss and we will do it our way. We will live on our own terms, we will have our own beatitudes - and whatever gods there may be, I will make sure that I am my own god'. That was the same philosophy as those who listened to the Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' listeners had the same mindset. You see they knew how to be spiritually proud, they knew how to be self-sufficient in all ways, they knew how to be religious, they knew all the ways in which to be pious and to be seen as pious, they were good with form. They thought that they were the in-group, and the only group, that would inherit heaven and they would be the ones who would survive if all would diminish.

Do you remember a few weeks ago, we thought about the types of people that the Lord Jesus was speaking to in the Sermon of the Mount? Two of those that we mentioned were the Pharisees and the Zealots, there were also the Sadducees and the Essenes. But the Pharisees and the Zealots, what the Lord Jesus Christ said in verse 5 was specifically applicable to them: 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth'. You see the Pharisees believe - those who were in the Pharisaical school, that kept all the rules, who were Jews more than any other Jews - they were people who believed that God, by His Messiah, was going to supernaturally bring upon the earth the kingdom of God - the millennial reign of His Christ. They believed that. That it would not happen by military power, but rather God would raise up His Messiah and, by miraculous means, this Messiah would wipe away the Roman rule and empire from Judah and would take to Himself the throne in Jerusalem and would rule in a supernatural way. That is what they believed. Even the disciples believed that at one point. You remember in Acts chapter 1 and verse 6, they said to the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Lord, are You going to bring a supernatural miracle that will bring Your kingdom upon the earth here and now?'. But of course they were blinded, as they were always blinded, as the Lord tried to minister to them - and as He said specifically and categorically on one occasion in John 18:36: 'My kingdom is not of this world, but My kingdom is in the hearts of men'. That wasn't good enough for the Pharisees, they wanted an earthly kingdom and they wanted it now, and they wanted the Messiah and it didn't matter whether it was the Lord Jesus or not, they just wanted a man to bring them it supernaturally.

Then there were the Zealots. They weren't prepared, like the Pharisees, to wait on the kingdom of God. They weren't prepared to wait on Messiah coming, but they by any cost and by any means couldn't wait - so they would take the kingdom by force, they would establish it by rebellion within the state, and bring the kingdom of God to view. Can you imagine that - in the view of this macho backdrop that the Lord Jesus Christ was speaking to, the Pharisees who wanted Him to wipe away with a word of His power, all of the Romans from Jerusalem, and then the Zealots who were willing to die for their cause, and die for the establishment of the kingdom of Messiah in His land - can you imagine what they would have thought when the Lord Jesus Christ stands on that mount and He says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are the meek'? What would they have said in their mind? 'What kind of Messiah is this? What kind of deliverer is this? What kind of followers is this man going to attract and bring with Him? A bunch of sissies, a bunch of weaklings, meek people! They will never face Rome, they will never conquer it, they will never establish a kingdom for God and His Christ upon the earth!'. What must it have been for them? To hear these words, 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth' - and then to actually follow the Lord Jesus Christ along His life's path, to hear all His teachings, and then at the very end to see Christ bruised, beaten by one Roman - Pilate? To see the Messiah, the so-called Messiah, standing beside a criminal Barabbas. They were forced to say, 'That's not our Messiah, we will not have this man to rule over us', and they cried from the

depths of their being 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'. Was that what Isaiah meant when he said there was no beauty in Him that we should desire Him? 'How could Messiah die on a cross, sure everyone who dies on a cross is cursed of God, how could we have a Messiah six feet under in a grave, that is powerless? This Christ, this Jesus, is a disappointment to us!'.

But as the Lord Jesus Christ said to the two on Emmaus: 'If you had known the Scripture, you would have known that this is the way it ought to be'. What is God's currency for using people? I think, as the Lord Jesus Christ has turned everything on its head and made a paradox of the world's truth, sometimes as the church of Jesus Christ we do the same with His truth. We turn it back the same way again as it was in the first place, but if we turn to 1 Corinthians quickly this morning, and chapter 1, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we see God's currency of how He uses men and women. Paul put it like this, verse 26 and 27 of chapter 1: 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty'.

You see these Jews, these Pharisees, these Zealots, they didn't realize that God was choosing Christ - and He would not be a king in the earthly sense at that moment in time, but rather as it says in the book of Isaiah 40 to 66, that the Jews ignored, He would be Jehovah's servant. As Mark put it, He was coming into the world to serve not to be served. They missed the point entirely didn't they? It is the weak things - and praise God today that we can say it is the weak things! God would not have chosen us, God would not be using us, God would not be taking us to heaven, we would not be the ambassadors of the Gospel if He didn't choose the weak things of this world, isn't that right? We say it, but I wonder do we really believe it?

Sometimes we think God needs superstars, don't we? And when a film star gets converted, or a sports star, he's all around the country giving his testimony - and I'm not despising that - but we think that that means a lot. That God needs superstars, that God needs men that the world thinks are great to bring His Gospel but - praise God - God doesn't need that! But what God does need is meekness. For blessed are the meek, approved are the meek, accepted with God are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

I want us quickly to look at three things: what is meekness and what it is not. And then secondly: what meekness brings into our lives. And then thirdly: how do you know if you're meek?

First of all, what is meekness and what it is not. Now let me say this: meekness is not weakness, it is not weakness. It is not wishy-washiness, it is not to be indecisive, to be timid, to be unsure of yourself, it's not even to be polite or to be affable or naturally kind or nice. Many of you have pet dogs at home and they're kind and they're nice, but you wouldn't say that they're meek - it's just their character, that they're nice, but that is not meekness. It is not cowardice, it is not spinelessness, it is not a willingness to have peace at any price and cost, it's not lacking in confidence, it's not shyness, it's not the opposite of extrovertedness, it's not simply good manneredness, or proper social convention, and it is certainly not a lack of conviction. Some dictionaries define meekness as deficient in courage. Let me say categorically, no matter what it means in the English language today, it does not mean that in the word of God.

So what does it mean? Well, if you look at the word of God, and you look at the Greek word for meekness, it simply means 'to be gentle, to be humble, to be considerate, to be courteous'. In fact it's related to the word 'poor' in the first beatitude 'Blessed are the poor', but it's a little bit different in its emphasis. In classical Greek, in that language, it was used by three different types of people. First it was used by doctors, it was then used by sailors, and thirdly by farmers. The doctor used this word 'meek' to describe a soothing medicine that would take away pain. The sailor used the word 'meek' of a lovely cool breeze that brings freshness, that refreshes the sailors. And then thirdly, the farmer uses this word 'meek' of an ass that is broken and is able to be used, and useful, in the farm. Basically, to give you an A-B-C definition of the word

'meekness' it's simply this: it is power under control. Now get that, it is power under control. What do I mean by that? Well what do doctors use? They use medicine, but they use them, they don't abuse them. There is the abuse of drugs, isn't there? Drug abuse, it can wreck your body, it can wreck your mind, it can wreck your family, and if you have that power of medicine and if it is without control in your life it will destroy you.

That lovely cool breeze that the sailor experienced, but we know all too well, from America and from our television sets, that a hurricane can destroy a whole nation, a whole town, all your possessions can go up because of something that is out of control. A bucking bronco can be out of control, try and get on a horses back that's not broken - and the damage that it will do. But the meaning of meekness, the meaning of it is this: power under control.

What does it mean for the Christian? It means this, it means: self-emptying. It means self-humility, it means self-brokenness before God, it is the person who is dead to self. And John Wycliffe in his old translation, translated this beatitude: 'Blessed are mild men'.

Now to understand this beatitude, we must see it in the sequence of the beatitudes. You see this is like a chain, like a row of beads and each one is joined together, they need one another. You need to be poor in spirit, and what we saw was that the first beatitude, to be poor in spirit - what was it? It was the knowledge of sin. That you and I know that we are sinners, we know that we have done wrong in the eyes of God, it is an intellectual knowledge. What is the second beatitude? Blessed are they that mourn - that is when that intellectual knowledge takes the 16 inch journey to your heart and you begin to feel mournful over your sin, you begin to feel like a sinner. Now, the third beatitude, meekness, is simply this: it is willing to be seen as sinful, willing to be seen the way God sees you and the way other people see you, let me give you an illustration. All those that are married here today - I haven't been married long, but I know this much: that the wife can say all she likes about you, isn't that right? And she does at times, but well dare anyone else say the words that she says about you, isn't that right? It's the same with meekness. The word of God says that I am a sinner. I can get up in the prayer meeting, or in this pulpit, and preach that I am a sinner, I can call myself the chief of sinners - but if I got down off this pulpit, or down from the prayer meeting on a Friday night, and was standing at the door and someone came up to me and shook my hand and said, 'David you're an awful, damnable sinner' - they may get a black eye, or a broken nose, because we may know what we are intellectually, we may feel what we are emotionally, but we may not be willing to be classed it by other people. Friends, that is meekness in our sense, in our sinful sense that is what it means to be willing to be seen as God sees you. Bunyan put it like this 'He who is already down cannot fall'. It is the abdication of self off the throne of our life.

Let me give you some Scriptural examples - first of all, Abraham. Abraham, in Genesis chapter 12, was told by God that his seed - and remember Abram means 'father', and Abraham means 'father of many'. Now you can imagine what it was like in the town when this man who had no kids, his wife was barren, was called father - and then God came along to him and said, 'I want you to change your name now to father of many'. Can you imagine the laugh that there was? And even he laughed, and his wife laughed, when God said that he would bear a son, and his seed would be raised, and that seed would be the seed of many nations and specifically God's nation of Israel. Then Genesis 13, he and his nephew have gone into a new spot of land. He's standing there and he knows, probably, that Lot wants the best part of the land, I don't know, but he stands there - Abraham - as a meek man and he tells Lot: 'You pick whatever bit you want, and I'll take whatever's left'. Now if that was you or me, I suspect that I would be saying, 'Look at the last chapter there, I'm the one the covenant was given to, I'll take the best land because God's people are going to dwell there' - but not Abraham. Because Abraham, like those in Romans 12 and verse 10 that Paul was talking about, are giving preference to one another in honour.

Look at Joseph, Joseph goes through the journey and eventually he ends up in Egypt high over all - like Pharaoh, but he wasn't Pharaoh, but he was like him - and he's there ruling over the nation. And then his brothers that forsook him, that dumped him in a pit and sold him as a slave, they come begging for food because there's a famine in Israel. If that was you or I what would we do? We would say: 'Now let me tell you a story and then I'll tell you 'No!'. You left me in a pit, you told my father that I was dead, you sold me as a slave. I went into jail, I suffered many things, and you're here begging for bread from me! Get away!' - but Joseph was meek. And then we have David, and Saul is after David's blood, the nation wants David as their king, and Saul is after him, pursuing him - and one day David comes across Saul. He finds him lying asleep, it's his chance and you or I would be saying, 'I'll get him before he gets me' - but not David! He took a few of his possessions so that Saul would know that he was there and he didn't take his life, but David was meek. Moses, in Numbers chapter 12 and verse 3, is described as the meekest man that ever lived. Christ - look at our Lord Jesus! He was mocked, He was spat upon, and as He stood before His accusers He answered nothing back to them, He was betrayed by His friends and all He could do was answer and call Judas His friend. And as He hung upon that cross in Luke 23 and verse 34, He actually uttered the words: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do'.

Now I'll be honest with you, this, for many years, has confused me and I'm only now beginning to understand it in measure - what true meekness is. Because immediately when I read about the Lord Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth, gentle Jesus meek and mild, that He was full of meekness - I ask myself, 'Well then what about Him when He went into the temple? When He drove them out with whips, what about then? Was that meekness? What about Him when He stood eyeball to eyeball to the Pharisees and called them foxes? When He said they were dead sepulchres, dead on the inside and white on the outside - what about that? What about when He turned to one of His disciples, Peter, and called him Satan? What about Moses when he came down with the ten commandments, in an anger at the orgy that was happening at the bottom of the mountain, he threw down the tablets. What about then? The meekest man in the world, why did he do that?'. Now this is important for our understanding of what true meekness is. Meekness says this: 'I will never defend myself, but I'll die defending God'. Have you got it? That's it in a nutshell. Never defending your reputation, yourself, what men say to you. But what do we do? We turn it upside down, and we would go to the four corners of the world to save our name or our reputation, but when Christ's name is taken in vain we say nothing. Isn't that why the Lord whipped them out of His temple? Isn't that why Moses threw the tablets down the mountain at their idolatry? Isn't that why the Lord Jesus Christ could stand, and John the Baptist, boldly and recount the sins of a nation before their very faces? Isn't that why he [John the Baptist] lost his head, because he counted himself as nothing? Meekness is power under control in such a way that you are silent when self is at stake - like Christ - but you're like a roaring lion, like Elijah on Mount Carmel, when God's name and reputation is at stake. That is what meekness is and what it is not.

But just for a few moments let us look, secondly, at what meekness brings. Meekness, it says, look at the verse, verse 5, those that are meek, 'Blessed are they for they shall inherit the earth'. Now this is emphatic, just like all the beatitudes so far, it's emphatic - it means only those that are meek will inherit the earth. This is the opposite to Darwin and all that he said, 'Survival of the fittest', this is 'Survival of the meekest!'. What is this? Twofold: in a spiritual sense it is having nothing, but possessing everything. Having nothing, but if I've Jesus - Jesus only! - that's all we need. But secondly what it also is, it is in a literal sense. For we have the Zealots and they said, 'We want a military Messiah'. Then you had the Pharisees, they said, 'We want a miraculous Messiah, that will bring the kingdom by miracles'. Then you had the Sadducees, 'We want a materialistic Messiah, for down here there's no afterlife, all that matters is what's here'. And then you have the Essenes, 'We want a monastic Messiah'. What did Jesus say? You're getting a meek Messiah, and it's only those that are meek that will inherit the kingdom. That is what meekness is, that is what meekness brings, it brings the inheritance of the whole earth.

Thirdly, how do you become meek? Let's look at this for just a moment. Psalm 37 and verse 1 says this: 'Fret not because of evildoers' - the whole Psalm is about that. How can the wicked be victorious? How can they prosper and the righteous are trodden in the dust by the wicked? That Psalm teaches that we are meek by our attitude to life. When we esteem others - and let these words sink in, because I believe they're forgotten, they may even be ripped out of our Bibles psychologically speaking - esteem others better than yourselves. Your attitude to life. Secondly meekness through your attitude to the word of God, James 1 verse 19, he exhorts us to receive the engrafted word with meekness. What does that mean? If God the Holy Spirit, through His word, tells you today that you're not meek - you accept it and you do something about it. That means not applying the word of God to the person beside you, or behind you, or someone you know in your family, or beside you at home who is like this. It's applying it to yourself, to your own soul, to your own life week after week, every time God speaks. Thirdly, it's your attitude to your brothers and sisters, preferring one another in honour. Fourthly, it's your attitude to those that you disagree with - 2 Timothy 2:24-25, Mr. Wan (sp?) translates it like this: 'The Lord's servant must not quarrel but be gentle to all, good, do not take offence, or show offence, one who can reduce his opponents by the mildness of his manner'. Is that what we are like? Fifthly, it's our attitude to the unsaved. For, in 1 Peter 3 and verse 15, we read that the hope that is within us, we've to give a reason for it always, but we are to present it in meekness.

Let me ask you in closing: how do you know that you're meek? Here's a few questions that you can regulate your meekness: Do you have self-control? Do you always obey the word of God? Do you make peace not war? How do you respond to criticism? Ultimately you can't be saved without meekness. Because Psalm 149 says: 'He will beautify the meek with salvation'.

Now in conclusion let's think about this: When you are meek you seek nothing for yourself, and when you are meek God gives you everything. You will inherit the earth - not the high flyers, not the tycoons - but the children of God will inherit, and meekness means to be finished with me for good. Finished with self.

Can I close the words of the Lord Jesus Christ? 'Come unto Me all ye who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest for your soul'.

Our Father, we acknowledge this morning, that He must increase - and even we would add to that, through the meekness that our Lord Jesus Christ showed - others must increase and we must decrease. Him exalting, self abasing, this is victory. Lord, it is this spirit that won the lost to Christ, through Christ. And it is only this spirit, by His Spirit in us, that will win the lost to Christ in our lives and in this place. Lord, help us to be meek - and if Thou dost show Thy grace toward us to make us meek, Thou art obliged to have us inherit the earth. Lord, help us to have the mind within us that was in our Lord Jesus Christ and to strive to be like Jesus. All we ask is to be like Him. Amen.

*The Beatitudes - Chapter 6****"Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst
After Righteousness"***

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Matthew chapter 5 and we begin to read at verse one to refresh our minds with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ -- and that's important to remember, that these words are no ordinary words. Not only are they the word of God, as from Genesis to Revelation all the words are, but they are actually the words of the Lord Jesus Christ also.

"And seeing the multitudes," - verse one - "He went up into a mountain: and when He was set," - or sat down - "His disciples came unto Him: And He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that do mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and shall persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." - to fill up - "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Let us pray together: Lord we worship Thee at this time, as the great God of eternity, the great God of Thy word, the great God of truth; and we bow before Thee in reverence and and in fear. And we ask that through Thy word, Thou wouldst speak to Thy children -- for Lord, we need Thee, we need to be satisfied with Thee, we need to be filled by the Bread of heaven, the Bread of God -- the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, as we have sung already, that Thou would fill us with Thy Spirit, hearts that full surrender know, that the streams of living water, from our inner man may flow. For Christ's sake, Amen.

The nutritionists tell us that we are what we eat. Now I don't know how literally you want to take that, or interpret it, but literally it could mean that if you eat a fish supper, well, you are a fish supper. And if you eat a steak, well, walking down the road you're a steak. But scientifically speaking, and medically speaking, what you are is what you eat. For what we eat and what we take into our body and inwardly digest, it

becomes part of us. One of the best illustrations of that is water, that we drink water for many reasons, but our body is made up of water in the majority, but also our blood is comprised of water. So we need to drink water because that water becomes part of us, it becomes part of our body. We are what we eat.

But sadly many people have seen this within the natural realm and they have failed to see it within the spiritual realm. They have failed to see that in our world, whether they're saved or unsaved, that if they feed continually upon violence, upon excitement, upon erotica, upon all that the world has to offer, materialism and money -- eventually those things that they feed on will personify them, they will become those things. They will become what they eat. A great scholar on one occasion said, "As you think, you are". The things you think, you become. The things you inwardly digest, you personify them.

The great singer Elvis Presley, he never ever understood this. If any of you can remember Elvis Presley's life (I can't - I have to read about it), but if you can remember it, you will read in his biography that his life was a pitiful pursuit of materialism. It is noted that he followed after, not only materials, but sensuality of all kind. And in his hey-day it is said that \$5 million was his yearly income. Five million dollars, now that was a wee while ago. And in his first two years of stardom he had an overturn of \$100 million. It is said of him that he had three jets, he had two Cadillacs, he had a Rolls-Royce, he had a Lincoln Continental, a Buick and a Chrysler station wagon, a Jeep, a dune buggy, a converted bus and three motorbikes. His most favourite car was the famous 1960 Cadillac Limousine model. The top of it was veneered and covered in pearl, literal pearl, white veneer. The body all around it was sprayed with forty coats of specially prepared paint that included within it crushed diamonds and fish-scales. Nearly all the metal trimmings around that car were plated in 18-carat gold. Inside the car there were two gold covered telephones; a gold vanity case containing a gold electric razor, gold hair-clippers, electric shoe-buffer; a gold-plated television; a record player; an amplifier; air-conditioning and a refrigerator that was capable of making ice in two minutes solid. He had everything, didn't he? Didn't he? He had everything in this world's terms. This world that we live in, in all their philosophies, in all their religious beliefs, materially speaking and sensually speaking -- and we wouldn't even have time, and it would probably be immoral for us even to talk about what he went into in a sensual, sexual way. But in many people's terms, this man had everything! But do you know what he failed to recognise? That what you eat, you are. And if you know anything about that man's life, you will know this: that he died in his death as a victim of his appetites.

What does the Lord Jesus Christ say? "Blessed", verse six, "are they which do hunger and thirst". But the verse doesn't stop there, because all of us hunger and thirst. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled". I want to ask you five questions this morning. And the first question I want to pose to you, and I want you to honestly try to answer these within your own heart and soul, is this: What are you hungry for? It doesn't matter whether you are saved or unsaved: What are you hungry for? What is it that drives your life, that motivates you for living, getting up in the morning, taking your breakfast, feeding yourself, living? What are you living for? Is it the material or is it the spiritual? Are you like the pagan, that is engrossed in the pursuit of possessions; everything you can get, bring to yourself, put into your body; everything that you can do that will make you feel - in this world's terms - more worthwhile? Or is it as the Lord Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will follow after that'.

What is this righteousness that the Lord Jesus talks of? What are you hungry for? Are you hungry for the world's goods or are you hungry for the righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of in this verse, verse six? What is it? Well, to some people in our world, and sadly our church, it is a form of Victorian prudishness. It's a narrow-mindedness, it may even be seen as a violent legalism. And within the church, and within some Christians -- even now among them -- it is seen as something that is totally unnecessary, and it's certainly not popular.

Ask yourself, Christian: we're prepared to hunger and thirst after anything, aren't we? We can hunger and thirst after spiritual maturity, and that's good. We can hunger and thirst after real happiness, real joy, deep down in our hearts. We even hunger after the Spirit's power, and if we're not there's something wrong with that. We can hunger after witnessing skills, and ways in which to cleverly win others to Christ. Others run after preachers, to one preacher, to another preacher; from conference to conference; from meeting to meeting -- some out every night of the week -- seeking a blessing from God. And they may even have a hunger after a spiritual experience -- but is that a hunger after righteousness? Is it?

I would like to suggest to you all this morning that it's not. It's not a hunger after righteousness, because there is a progression here within the Beatitudes that we have seen week after week. What was the first Beatitude? "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". What was that? Intellectual knowledge of the sin that is in your heart. Beatitude number two: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted". What is that? That is emotional knowledge, emotional feeling of what you are like in the sight of God. Three Beatitude: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth". What was that? Being willing not only to know in your head, to feel in your heart, but to be seen for what you are to those around. Social knowledge of your sinfulness. You see, it's step-by-step. Verse three is the first step, verse two is the second -- or sorry, verse three, verse four is the second -- verse five is the third and verse six is the fourth and you can't jump from one to four, you can't do it. You have to come all the way one, two, three and then four. Why do you have to do that? Because it's a progression. You see, having the righteousness of God and Christ, and being filled by it, it's not bringing to yourself things -- but do you know what it is? It's emptying yourself of things! It's getting all the rot and the dirt and the sin, the self-righteousness, even your selfish goodness that is within you that you think is great -- it's getting it all out. And all you can do is make yourself empty. Why? Because it's a progression, it's not optional. Dr Lloyd-Jones said this, "If this verse blesses you, if this verse speaks to you, you can be certain that you are a Christian. But if you don't know what this verse means, if it even makes you feel squeamish when you think of the implications of it and the consequences in your life, you can be almost sure -- and I do not say this lightly -- that you are not a Christian".

This righteousness, what is it? Well, there are three types of righteousness within the word of God. The first type is legal righteousness -- that is the righteousness we read of in the book of Romans and the book of Galatians. That we are justified by faith, we have been made righteous, the slate has been made clean -- the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, that means His goodness, His holiness, His ability to keep the law and holy rules of God -- it has been credited, imputed, imparted to our account, into our life. That's how you get saved. And if you are here this morning and you're not saved, you may forget about it, because you'll never get saved if you're trying to get saved by yourself, if you're trying to work works of righteousness, if you're trying to climb your way to heaven, if you're doing anything -- going to church, being religious, trying even to be a good citizen in the community -- forget about it! For the only way a man is justified before God, is if God the Father gives to you by His Spirit the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It's like God writing a cheque for you with Christ's righteousness -- you taking it to your bank account of your soul and life and cashing it in. My friend, if you're relying on anything else this morning you'll be doomed and you'll be damned, because there's nothing else that saves but Christ.

That's legal righteousness. Then there is moral righteousness, and I don't believe that what the Lord Jesus is speaking of here was legal righteousness. But I believe it was moral righteousness, and we'll learn in a minute what that is. But out of moral righteousness, flows social righteousness. What is that? Good works, doing good deeds, deeds of love, deeds of kindness, deeds of Christian society -- out of moral righteousness flows social righteousness, because faith without works is absolutely dead. If you look at verse 10 and verse 20 you see that the word righteousness is used again, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". Verse 20, "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees", that cannot mean legal

righteousness, because if you have the righteousness of Christ in your heart, your righteousness can never exceed another's righteousness -- because they're both the righteousness of Christ, and nobody can top that.

So this is moral righteousness that we're talking about. And indeed throughout the whole of the Sermon on the Mount this is the righteousness that is talked about seven times. You know what it is? It is the desire for righteousness to prevail, goodness to prevail in my life and in my heart and in the world. It is a thirst, an increasing, amplified thirst after the sense and the need of God in my life. It is seeking, it is following hard after God's will in your life, for God to be the centre of your life, the centre of your motives, your activities, your purposes, your family, your work, everything. For God to have everything and be in everything. What is it? That great Scottish preacher put it like this, Murray McCheyne, "Lord, make me as holy as a saved sinner can be". That's what is. To hunger and thirst after this righteousness, asking God.

What are you hungry for? I'm asking you: what are you hungry for? But secondly, how hungry are you for it? Maybe you say, 'David, of course I want that. I'm a Christian, what else would I want?' But let me say: how hungry are you? Not just feeling something that is missing in your life as a Christian, not even simply an earnest yearning in your heart, that's not what it is. It's not even a relentless pursuit. This is something that is all-inspiring, this is something that is, humanly speaking, all-consuming. It is the pursuit after God's will in the most extreme terms. You know we can't really enter into this morning, because in the days of Palestine, you know, thirst was serious and hunger was serious. If we're thirsty now we go to the tap. If we're hungry now we go to the fridge, or go to McDonald's. Fast food, the food's smothering us now -- but in those days to be hungry or to be thirsty was a desperate situation and there was nothing could be done but to seek hard after drink and food, because people were never far from dehydration or from starvation -- this isn't a comfortable picture. This is an awful picture. It's a picture of intense, a desperate hunger, not wishy-washy desire for spiritual growth or maturity -- but a starvation within your heart and your soul for God and to see God in the midst of your life. How hungry are you for God? How hungry are you for God in your life? And this is a continual hunger, the word of God tells us this. For in verse six the tense of what the Lord Jesus Christ said is this: those who are hungering and thirsting continually, day after day. This, let me tell you, is the secret to Christian success. A hearty spiritual appetite where you can get never enough of God.

Do you remember the days when you were first saved? Do you? I know what Christians mean when they say: 'well, those days suddenly peter out and the joy that you had and the satisfaction that you had -- well, you have to be mature and you have to face certain things'. And in a measure that's true, and sometimes not all of that joy stays, but I think the devil has hoodwinked us, you know. Because the Lord says here that there is a joy after hungering for God and it's continual, it's to last the rest of your Christian days. And if you don't have the thirst after God that you had when you were saved, an insatiable desire to know God, ask yourself today: what has happened? Is it job, is it family, is it studies, is it position? Whatever it is, something has taken over, and taken that place. Let me quote Mr Darby for a minute, "To be hungry is not enough", he says, "I must be really starving to know what is God's heart toward me. When the prodigal son was hungry he went to feed on the husks of the pigs, but when he was starving he went to his father". Let me say this: the church of Jesus Christ at large is feeding on the husks of the pigs. We are like children -- and like someone said, when a child, a toddler, is crawling across the floor and there's something dirty on the floor, it doesn't know any better and it picks it up and puts it in its mouth. And the church of Jesus Christ at large are babes putting everything into their mouth, doing all the things that seem right in their own eyes. Even we ourselves, in our Christian lives, and we have forgotten because we have not been starving after God -- we've only been hungry. Jesus said: 'Blessed are they who are desperately hungry and thirsty for righteousness'.

Thirdly, third question: what motivates your hunger? Not just what are you hungry for, or how hungry are you, but what motivates your hunger? The Lord Jesus said, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled'. Is that what motivates your hunger after God -- so that you will be

filled? But let me ask you: filled with what? We're all hungry here. We all sense a hunger, we mightn't all be starving after God, but we're all in some way hungry. But many of us watch more murders and adulteries on television in one week than our grandparents read about in their whole lifetime. Many of us fill our lives with filth and dirt even now unconsciously, without a twinge of conscience about it. And what we are doing is making a judgement of tacit approval upon the evil that is in this world -- and the pollsters tell us today that the gap, ethically speaking, morally speaking, between the world and the church is narrowing.

Friends this morning, some of us are as unconcerned about the lost as they are about themselves. If you have a holy discontent in your life, the Lord Jesus says you are blessed. What does that mean? I'll tell you what this means: it means being fanatical about Christ! Being, if I can say it reverently, 'bananas' about the Gospel! Are you approved of God in that way? We learnt that 'approved of God' means His smile, being blessed is to have Christ smile on you -- if you're not content with your Christian life, praise the Lord, for you shouldn't be!

But fourthly, I want to say this to you, not just ask you a question of what you're hungry for, and how hungry are you, and what motivates your hunger: but do you want to be filled? Do you? Well listen, let me give you a warning, because being filled is an 'insatiable satisfaction'. What does that mean? Well, to be satisfied is to be filled. But to be insatiable is to be continually unfilled. This filling of the Lord Jesus Christ, with righteousness is something that once you are filled, you need to be continually filled by it because the more you get the more you hunger after, and although we're filled we never are truly satisfied. We always seek more of God, of Christ and of His righteousness. This righteousness is so wonderful that you always want more. Lensky (sp?) translated it and put it like this, "This hungering and thirsting continues and in fact", listen, "increases in the very act of being satisfied". The more you're satisfied, the more you get of Christ, the more you get of the word, the more you get of the Holy Ghost, the more you get of prayer the more and more you want! It's like Pringles -- 'once you pop, you can't stop'. And it's 'moreish', the more of Christ you get, the more of Christ you want.

Let me illustrate it with two characters from the word of God. Moses: Moses was standing, looking after those sheep and what did he see? A burning bush -- can you imagine if this week you saw a burning bush when you were walking through a forest park? You would write a book on it, you would shoot a video on it and you would live the rest of your Christian life upon it, wouldn't you? That's what I would do. Then what did he do? He delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt! He, through God. He raised his hand and the Red Sea opened, what would we think if that happened within our lives. Think of the mighty things he did, he was trusted with the plans of the tabernacle of God, he saw God guide the Israelites through the wilderness with the pillar, the Shekinah glory of God. He saw water come from a rock, he saw manna come from heaven. But do you know what Moses said? 'I know I've seen all that Lord, I know that. But Lord, show me Thy glory'. I would have said, 'Moses, now hold on a minute, I think you've seen quite a bit. I think you've seen enough, haven't you? I think you've done well for a man of God in your lifespan'. But Moses wanted more, because it's an insatiable satisfaction, it's continual. Think about Paul. In Acts 9, he saw the Lord Jesus Christ -- he saw Him in conversion -- then again in the book of Acts further on, in the city of Corinth it says, that he saw Him again! And then we read further on in, in Corinthians, that he was actually translated to heaven itself and he had seen things that were unspeakable to utter for any man, and he said in Timothy 'I know whom I have believed'. Yet he could say this, 'that I might know Him'. Paul couldn't get enough. Can you get enough? My friend, if you are content where you're sitting listen to the words of Bernard of Clairvoux, when he said in the hymn, 'We taste Thee Oh Thou Living Bread, and long to feast upon Thee still. We drink of Thee, the Fountain Head and thirst our souls from Thee to fill'.

Let me ask you, fifthly and finally: how's your appetite? How is it? You see, today the world is what it eats. It's hungry after sex, it's hungry after wealth, it's hungry after violence and excitement. But the tragedy is that

many Christians have this hunger in their own soul and they're feeding it. They're seeking the same things as the world are, and they find that they are as empty and pathetic as the world themselves!

How do you know if you're hungering and thirsting after righteousness? One: are you satisfied with yourself? For Christian friend, if you are, you're in trouble. The old puritan said, 'He has most need of righteousness who least wants it'. And the person in here that is not saved and doesn't even consider or want to get saved, you're in need of it more. Do you think of everyone else as worse than yourself? Or that you're right and everyone else is wrong? Do externals in the Christian life satisfy you? The way the person is dressed, the version of the Bible they read -- I'm not saying that's unimportant, but is that what satisfies you? Do you fill your appetite with the wrong stuff? Do materials influence the way you feel in life? Is the word of God sweet to your taste? Or do you say: 'I want Christ, but I want my sin as well. I want Christ, but I want my money. I want Christ, but I want my pride -- just keep a little bit of it Lord, just a wee fix for myself. I want Christ, but I want to keep my lust'. Listen, think of the hungry man crawling through the desert, crying 'Water! Water!', looking for that oasis. Does he want water and a car? Does he want water and a house? Does he want water and a new suit? He wants water, and water alone! For only water can satisfy. Christian, it's only the Lord Jesus Christ that can fill that gap in your life. Sinner, it's only His righteousness that can save you and can give you peace and can give your heart joy! That's all, He alone can make those waters spring within your soul.

Let me finish with this story. It is Remembrance Sunday today and there is a famous military leader, by the name of Major B. Gilbert. And he tells in his book entitled "The Last Crusade" of the thirst that he and his men suffered in the Palestinian desert in World War I. Listen, now I'm going to quote what he said: 'Our heads ached, our eyes became bloodshot and dim in the blinding glare of the sun. Our tongues began to swell over our lips, our lips turned to purplish black and eventually burst. Those who dropped out of the column were never seen again. But the desperate force battled on to Sherijah (sp?), and there were wells at Sherijah and they had been cooled in the concrete that they were built with. And these men did fight, they did fight for their lives and when we came to the station in Sherijah we left our heels behind running after that water. I believe that we all learned our first real Bible lesson on that trip from Beersheba to Sherijah. If such were our thirst for God and for His righteousness, for His will in our lives, a consuming, all-embracing, pre-occupying desire. How rich we would be in the fruit of the Spirit".

In Luke chapter 16 and verse 24, the rich man was in hell -- and some of you will be in hell if you don't trust Christ -- but he was in hell, and what did he ask for? Just a drop of water, just a drop of water on my tongue. Christian, that's the kind of thirst that you ought to have for God. May God bless His word to our hearts.

Our Father, we are so preoccupied at times with ourselves and with this world, Lord, that we fail to be hungry and thirsty in a desperate way for Thy righteousness, and Thy power, and Thy presence in our lives. Lord, give us an insatiable satisfaction, a thirst that cannot be quenched with Christ alone, but more of Christ, and more of Christ, and more of Christ -- until that day when we see Christ, and we are as He is. Lord speak, and help us in the stillness after this meeting not to be preoccupied with those things again of this world, not to be engaged in foolish conversation -- but Lord, for once, help us like the deer that pants after the water brook, that our soul would pant after Thee our God. For Christ's sake, Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 7

"Blessed Are The Merciful"

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Turn with me in your Bibles to the passage that we have been looking at for some weeks now. We've been studying the Beatitudes of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew's gospel and chapter 5. Matthew's gospel and chapter 5, and we're studying this morning from verse 7 - specifically the fifth Beatitude of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's read just all the Beatitudes again to refresh our memory about what the Lord has been saying to us.

Verse 1: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was sat down, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you".

Let's ask the Lord's help as we come to His word now: Our dear Father, we need Thy help today - we need Thy help always, but as we come to Thy word we feel especially our need of the Holy Ghost. Lord, we pray that Thou wilt fill the preacher, that Thou wilt fill each believer in this place that is listening for a word from Thyself. We know that many, perhaps, have not come into this place to hear what God is saying, but Lord we are concerned with those who are thirsty, with those who are hungry. For those that are not hungry and thirsty, Lord today that You would make them hungry for Thy word, for Thy truth and for Thy will. Lord, we say that our hearts are weak and poor until our Master we find, and we ask that today, as we come hungry and thirsty, that Lord as we come faint and low that we will learn what it is to be filled from God on high. Speak to us, we pray. Help us, for Christ's sake. Amen.

There's a story told of something that happened years ago in a small town where there was a business. The man who owned the business had two identical twin sons who were so close to one another that they dressed exactly the same. They were inseparable and, in fact, throughout all of their life they never married because they were so close to one another. When their father died they took over the family business. Their relationship was hailed around the whole area as a model of creative co-operation, not only in family life but within business. One day, as they were in the family business within the shop, one of the brothers was busy, so much so that he neglected to put a one dollar bill into the till. He left it sitting upon the counter, he went to serve another customer at the back of the shop, only to remember that he had left that one dollar bill sitting upon the counter. He rushed back to find that it was gone. He turned to his twin brother and asked him had he seen where it had went: 'Do you know the whereabouts of the one dollar bill?'. The brother said: 'No, I don't know where it is'. An hour later the same brother asked his brother once more: 'Do you know where the dollar bill went?'. He asked him again and again until his brother became defensive, and every time they tried to discuss the matter there was conflict that grew worse and worse, which culminated in vicious charges and counter-charges from one to the other.

The outcome was that the relationship was dissolved, their partnership was split up, there was the installation of a partition down the middle of the shop, and the two began competing with one another. This continued for 20 years, within the town it was a well-known fact that they had fallen out. But one day there was a car that drove up to the front of that business and [a man] walked into one of the brother's shops. It was a fancy car, he was in a fancy suit, he was well groomed and he stood at the counter and said: 'I have a score to settle with you'. The man said: 'Well, what score have you to settle with me? As far as I know I haven't a score to settle with anyone'. The man began to tell a story of how there was a day when he was poor, there was a day when he was weak, there was a day when he was cast down, he had no home to live in, nowhere to lay his head, no money. He was walking down the alley, down the side of their shop - and he saw upon the counter a dollar bill. Temptation got the better of him, he ran swiftly, took it from the counter and off he went. But he said, since that event, he had been brought up as a Christian by his mother, he knew what was right and wrong - and throughout his whole life his conscience was troubling him, that that one dollar bill had been stolen. So he says: 'I'm here, I'm here to settle the score, I'm here to pay any damages that I owe'. That brother stood there weeping and crying for 20 years of bitterness, for 20 years of sorrow, of the loss of the closest that he had to him - and then he told that man: 'You better go next-door and tell my brother what has happened'. That man left them both, two identical twins, standing weeping.

This Beatitude that we're going to study this morning is: 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy'. This Beatitude, whether we realise it at the first glance, it is the remedy, it is the cure for all bitterness - whether in family, whether in fellowships, whether in your own heart or in your mind. If you, this morning, have the problems of these twins - and let me tell you that there are many that have these problems, many a brother to a brother that has broken up, many a brother to a sister, a man to a wife, a father to a son, or daughter, or mother, and the relationship has been broken through bitterness - if you have that problem this Beatitude is the message of liberation.

Now let's think for a moment, and recap about the background of the Beatitudes. If you turn with me for a moment, just back a few pages, to Matthew chapter 3 we will see the context and the backdrop of what the Lord Jesus was preaching against within the Beatitudes. Matthew chapter 3 and verses 7 to 12: 'But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down', cut down, 'and cast into the fire'. The Lord Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees and the Sadducees here, He is speaking to their religiosity, their self-righteousness, their perception that - provided they looked alright, they talked alright, they walked alright on the outside - it didn't matter what was inside, it mattered what was outside. They were men and women who followed the law of external holiness, and thought that that was enough.

If you were to turn to Matthew chapter 23, you again see the background, the context of what the Lord Jesus was up against as He ministered in Palestine at this time. Matthew 23 and verse 27, He says: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity'. 'You're like a dead tomb! On the outside you're all clean, you may be engraved, you may be covered in beautiful colours, you may be perceived by those around to be pure, to be holy, to be white - but within your very heart of hearts, your soul of souls, deep down in the real person you're dead!'

What matters - the Lord Jesus Christ is getting at - within all these beatitudes, is what is in the inside. What is inside! The change that has been wrought by God the Holy Spirit within the soul of a man, the new birth,

something that brings eternal life to bear on your external life. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it like this: 'A Christian is something before he does something'. The first four beatitudes that we've been studying over the past weeks really centre upon the inner principles that deal with how you are before God, how you are yourself. But we're looking this morning - and will be continuing to look at in the weeks that follow - from five on, the fifth Beatitude on, in verse 7. And these cease to deal with, primarily, how we are within ourselves before God, but they begin to deal with how we are before our brothers and sisters, and our attitudes to those around us. The first four are inner attitudes, the last four are inner attitudes that manifest themselves outwardly.

Let's look at verse 7 this morning: 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy'. What does it mean? Is it the humanistic philosophy: 'Well, if you're good to everybody else, everybody else will be good to you'? Is that what it means? Because there are many Christians, and that's how they interpret it, that's how they read it. What does it mean? Does it mean that God cannot be merciful to you unless you are merciful to other people? Is that what it means? Does it mean unless you forgive other men their sins, before that God can never forgive you your sins?

The Greek word for 'mercy' within the New Testament simply means this: 'to give help to the wretched, to relieve the miserable'. To give help to the wretched, to relieve the miserable. Therefore there are a few comparisons I want to make for us to understand, today, what mercy really is, how we obtain it, how we commit it, and how we get it from God. To do this we have to make some distinctions and comparisons. First of all we have to compare mercy and grace, then we have to compare mercy and compassion, then we must compare mercy and forgiveness - and then we need to ask the question: what mercy obtains mercy from God?

First of all let's compare mercy and grace. Often within the New Testament, and within the whole of the Scriptures, the word grace and the word mercy are synonymous - they mean the same thing. They mean: 'God goodness which has been shown to mankind'. But often, within the New Testament especially, there is a distinction between the meaning of grace and the meaning of mercy. Grace simply means: 'the love of God which has been shown to undeserving men'. God's love towards people that have sinned against Him, towards sinners that have broke His law, that are guilty in a legal sense before God - grace is the lavishing of God's love upon those people. But where there is the distinction, mercy is compassion that is shown to the miserable. It's a bit hard at first to see the difference between the two, but if you liken it to this: grace is taking away the guilt that is over us. God comes - we do not deserve it, we cannot merit it - but God comes and He lifts away the guilt that is ours by right, He takes it away from us. But mercy...mercy is the compassion of God, that when He looks upon us it motivates Him to lift that guilt off us.

The mercy of God speaks of those that are helpless, those that are miserable. It's another word for compassion, that He looks, He sees those that are wounded, He sees those that are broken, those that are sorrowing, those that have no hope, the hopeless of the hopeless - and He looks upon them in compassion, He sees their misery and He tries to heal them. Grace is when God pardons sin, when God pardons us. I hope you can see the difference between mercy and grace.

But then we need to compare mercy and compassion - because mercy, in the first sense, primarily means compassion. I want to stress this in the strongest way that I can: that mercy is not simply feeling compassionate. I call feeling compassionate: 'the hurdle of spiritual imagination, the barrier of Christian intentions' - and this is something that I fight with day by day, week by week, and I believe that we all - if we're honest - will fight with this for the rest of our lives: Christian intentions, the barrier, the hurdle of Christian imagination. In other words: what I know I ought to do! What I talk about with people, what I think about, what I read about, what I preach about - but no matter how much energy I can muster up within

myself, I cannot bring myself to bring it about! Compassion is not feeling compassionate, it is more than a feeling, but it is an active verb - it is something that is shown, it is something that must be done.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 10, for in Luke chapter 10 we have just this that the Lord Jesus is trying to illustrate - what it is to have compassion upon another. We have within this chapter the story of the good Samaritan, and you remember the priest walked by the man that was lying bleeding, beaten up, you remember the Levite walked by the man. They both looked, I'm sure within the depths of their soul they both felt compassion upon him, but we read the Lord Jesus Christ's words in verses 36 and 37: 'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise'. You remember that this parable of the Lord Jesus Christ was told when the man asked Him: 'Who is my neighbour?'. He was then told of how this Samaritan man - who was ethnically, socially, politically barriered from the Jews - came as his enemy and showed compassion to this poor man. What did the Lord Jesus Christ say? Did He say: 'Go and feel compassion', 'Go and feel this way about those that are poor'? No! He says: 'Go, and do thou likewise'!

The minor prophets, that we have been studying on Monday nights, but two of them that we haven't looked into - Amos chapter 5 and in the whole book of Hosea - talk about false religion that talks about, that preaches about, that writes about caring for one another, and caring for the world around them, but their words are empty. This is illustrated, I believe, by the 19th-century preacher. As he was coming along the highway he crossed his friend whose horse was killed in an accident, and while the crowd of onlookers stood by and began to express empty words of sympathy about what had happened, the preacher stood up and he put his hand in his pocket, and he turned to the loudest sympathiser and he said: 'I am sorry five pounds, how much are you sorry?' - is that not what mercy is? Is that not what compassion is? Not feeling it, not talking about it, not preaching, or singing, or reading about it - it is actually doing it! Mercy demands action! Mercy is, if you like - to put it crudely - putting your money where your mouth is! Mercy is more than feeling, for the good Samaritan looked and he saw the wounds, and he didn't just want to dress them - he dressed them! He saw the man cast down, and he didn't just know that he should get him and pick him up and take him to an inn - he did it! The Lord Jesus Christ says to us today: 'Go, and do thou likewise'.

Mercy, first of all, is compassion. But secondly: mercy and forgiveness, how does mercy relate to forgiveness? Well, you see, mercy that the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking of here in verse 7 is not just compassion, but it is also expressed in forgiveness. Mercy is the love of God that forgives, and the love of God that pardons another who is wrong. Let me give you an example: Joseph in the Old Testament Scriptures. You remember what happened to Joseph, his brothers fell upon him, they brought him because he was the beloved of his father, they threw him down a pit, they were about to kill him - and the only thing that stopped them killing him was the fact that there were traders coming along the road, and they knew that they would get a bit of money for him. They sold him, they thought that they would never see him again. He went into prison after that - you know all the things that Joseph had to endure - but there was one day, later on in his life, when his brothers stood before him, and his brothers wept, his brothers were broken because of the predicament of famine that was in the land and in his own family. And Joseph, as they stood before him, they were in his hands to do with them as he pleased. Do you remember what happened? Joseph had to go out of the court to weep, to weep because of the compassion that he had upon his brothers because the family, the nation was starving - and he didn't act against them in the way that was his right, but he forfeited his right because of compassion.

Who is the greatest person that ever showed mercy? Is it not the Lord Jesus Christ? The most merciful human being that ever lived, because He looked, he went after the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the lame, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the drunkards, the weak little children. You remember the widowed woman that was following a coffin of her son - she'd already lost the breadwinner, and now one who could bring money into her home had died - and the Lord Jesus Christ stopped the procession, He touched the casket and

he brought life back into that woman's life, because He had compassion upon her! Remember John chapter 8, we have the woman caught in adultery - and there were all the religious men stuffed up with their own self-righteousness, standing about in their long garments with their big scrolls and beards, and looking ready to throw the stones at this woman. And they say: 'Rabbi, what do we do? Moses says stone her, what do You say we do?' - and the merciful Jesus looks at that woman and says: 'Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more'.

The Lord Jesus Christ was full of mercy, so much so that in Mark chapter 2 and verse 16 He's reprimanded by those about Him because He hangs about with the riff-raff of society, eating and drinking with the filth of the world. And the two merciless systems of all time, the empire of Rome and the Jews, they united together in their mercilessness before Christ to crucify Him, to nail Him to a cross. And the whole of the Lord's life, the whole of the Lord's kingdom, the whole of the Lord's teaching cries out this: that it was all of mercy! And that Christ's kingdom is a kingdom that gives, it does not take! Sure, isn't God full of mercy? He is full of mercy - why? Because He saw us in our pitiful state, He saw us the way that we were in our sin, with all the wrong that we have, with all the guilt, with all the ugliness of our filthy sores in His sight - yet He sent the Lord Jesus Christ! And listen, if you're not saved today: He sent Christ to save the sinner! What pity He had, He didn't have to do it, but He did it because He was rich in mercy!

The word of God says that He has declared: 'The pitiful, they shall obtain mercy'. And as He hung on the cross, what was it that He was praying for? He said: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do' - He was crying for mercy! And Stephen, that walked after Christ, and walked after Him in his death - what did he say? 'Lay not this charge against them, Lord, for what they are doing. Forgive them!'. Let me say this: mercy is not some foolish sentimentality that excuses or ignores sin - that's not what mercy is. But the only person that God shows mercy towards is the person to whom He has imputed the judgement of God upon Christ. What do I mean? God shows mercy towards us not in some sentimental, wishy-washy way that He feels sorry for us, because God must judge sin, God must condemn sin - and any time that you find in the Scriptures where mercy was extended to men, someone else had to take the judgement. It was the lamb in the Old Testament, praise God it's the Lamb of God in the New Testament! The only reason that we have the mercy of God extended to us today is because Christ has received the punishment! Christ has been made a curse for us, and remember always when we talk about mercy, Psalm 85 verse 10: 'Mercy and truth are met together'. Praise God for the cross.

But finally, there's mercy in grace, there's mercy in compassion, there's mercy in forgiveness - but there's mercy that obtains mercy. Now this has been misunderstood for centuries. People have looked at this verse and said: 'Well, you must be merciful if God is going to be merciful to you. This means that you must forgive others if you are to be forgiven' - but they're missing the point entirely, because the idea is simply this: that by performing acts of mercy you will show yourself to be forgiven by God. That's the point: that the person who has been shown mercy by God, the person who knows what it is like to taste of the forgiveness and the mercy of God - how can he be anything but forgiving? How can he be anything but merciful to those who he knows around him that are in the same predicament? That's what this passage means, that our compassion, our love for the lost, our love for the poor is out of a heart that has been forgiven, out of a heart that has been shined upon by the grace and the mercy and the peace of God Almighty - that is the standard that we have. When you have been the object of God's salvation it ought to be that you show mercy to those around you - and the greatest evidence that God has shined into your heart is when you help the helpless, when you lift the downtrodden, when you heal the broken-hearted.

This world's philosophy is coined in the words of a famous philosopher, when he said this: 'Mercy is the disease of the soul that spells weakness'. What does the world emphasise? What does our province emphasise? Rights! My right! It is my right to do this, to do that! I have the right here, I have the right there! If you were living in the Roman Empire, in Jesus day, do you know that if you were a Roman father you had

the right, when your child was born from the womb of its mother, that if you put the thumbs up that child would live, and if you put the thumbs down the child would die? That was a right! But I wonder if you were a Christian in that society would you take that right as your own - it's rightfully yours, but would you do it? In the Roman Empire you had the right to kill your slave and bury him. You could bury him, not another question asked by the legal system or by the police - you could do as you liked men, you could even kill your wife and get away with it! That was your right, would you take it?

In Romans chapter 1 and verse 29 to 31 we read a description of the city of Rome and those that lived in Rome. They were described as many things, but the very last word used to describe them is: 'unmerciful people'. Listen, my Christian friend today, the reality of this Beatitude in verse 7 is this, this is what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying and you must grasp this as a Christian: if you as a believer do not show mercy towards the physically and the financially pitiful - listen - you are not saved! I don't know if that's too strong, but it is not me that has put it that strong, it's the Lord Jesus Himself. The word of God testifies this: it was an answer to the Lord when he said: 'Love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your heart, and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself' - what was that? It's the way to be saved: to give everything to God, to show that you're wrong, to trust God. They could even do it in the Old Testament, he asked: 'Who's my neighbour?', for the priest or the Levite that failed to love their neighbour as themselves, they didn't get into the kingdom. Now don't get me wrong today, I'm not saying the opposite of what this is saying, that you have to be merciful or that you have to be forgiving - but if we look into our lives, and we search with the search light of God's holiness into our souls, and we see that we are unforgiving, that we are unmerciful - that is not a fruit of the Spirit! So what is it a fruit of?

1 John chapter 3 and verse 17 depicts this - in John's words, and you remember that in this epistle he talks so often about how we ought to love one another - now listen to the implications that emanate out of this verse, think about it! 'But whosoever', verse 17 of chapter 3 of 1 John, 'whosoever hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'. He is saying what the Lord Jesus is saying: if you don't have this compassion and this mercy in you, you don't have God in you. That is what the word of God is saying, that's what Jesus said in Matthew 18:21 to 35, where He talked about the unmerciful, the unforgiving servant. Remember, he owed the equivalent of 20 million dollars in today's terms! His master came and he wiped the slate clean because he asked him for forgiveness, and as soon as he went out of jail he found his friend that owed him the equivalent of 5000 dollars, and he grabbed him by the throat - unmerciful! The love of God was not in him.

This is surgical, this is dangerous, this is the scalpel of the Holy Spirit that goes right into our heart. This is what destroys us as Christians, as we see before God's word that we are poor, that we are broken, that within we mourn for our sins, that we are meek in front of all men and within ourselves, that we are empty and that God has to fill us - and then we realise that God has shown mercy upon us, therefore we see the pitifulness of all humanity, not just spiritually but physically and financially - and we show mercy to those around us.

Brethren, if we do not have the desire or the ability within ourselves to have compassion upon a dying world, a poor world; if we do not have it in our hearts for our brothers and sisters in Christ, to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us, we are in grave danger. For Jesus says that even the life of God may not dwell in our hearts. When we began these studies in the Beatitudes we asked two questions. First of all: is our faith real? Secondly: how healthy is our faith? I hope that we're beginning to see a diagnosis. Let me quote D.A. Carson as I close today, he said in relation to this Beatitude: 'I am persuaded that, should the Spirit of God usher in another period of refreshing revival in the Western world, one of the earliest signs of it will be the admission of spiritual bankruptcy which finds its satisfaction in God and His righteousness, and goes on to be richly merciful towards others'.

How merciful are you? Balaam in Numbers chapter 23 and verse 10, do you know what he said when he was dying? He was thinking of death and he said this: 'Let me die the death of the upright'. Let me die the death of righteous people! Maybe you're unsaved here, and you're asking: 'Let me die the death of a Christian'. Do you know what the old puritan said about him? (And I'm closing now) 'Balaam wanted to die like the righteous alright, he just didn't want to live like the righteous'. Are you merciful to others? Are you living in accordance with the Beatitudes? For Christ says: 'If you are, you are richly blessed'.

Lord, as we look into the mirror of Thy truth we see ourselves, and Lord it is not a pretty sight. We remember the Lord himself said: 'If you give a cup of water in my name, you do it unto me'. Lord, how many cups of water have we given in Thy name? How much mercy have we had to the poor, as Christ had? How much mercy and compassion and forgiveness do we extend to our brothers and sisters in Christ? Lord, help us to see today that is the road of obedience that is the road of blessing, that God desires obedience more than sacrifice. Lord, we are willing, help our unwillingness - and come in, dear God, and change us as the hymn says: 'To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus, all we ask is to be like Him'. Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 8

"Blessed Are The Pure In Heart"

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Chapter 5 of Matthew, beginning to read at verse 1 - we should know this passage off by heart by now, reading it so many times, but that's good because we get it into not only our heads, but hopefully we get it into our hearts.

"And seeing the multitudes, he" - the Lord Jesus - "went up into a mountain: and when he was sat down, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" - and this is today's - "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Let us pray together: Our dear God, we ask Thee this morning for Thy power, for the power of the Holy Spirit of God to be our portion in this place. As we open the word of God, as we seek the truth of God that He, as the only commentator of the word of God, would lead us into all truth. Lord, help us we pray, give us strength we pray - in our weakness pour in Thy mercy to strengthen us, that we may speak as thus saith the Lord. May every believer in this place, and even unbelievers that do not know Thee, dear God today may they receive a word from the Lord that will deliver them, that will liberate them, that will give them peace with their God. Bless us we pray now, and fill us with Thy Spirit, for Christ's sake. Amen.

"Blessed are the pure in heart", verse 8, "for they shall see God". According to the Reuters report from Stockholm in Sweden, Stockholm has long arrived at sexual freedom and liberality. We may have thought that that came within the 1960's, but there's more of it today. Old-fashioned fornication, that the Bible names as fornication, is quite accepted by all parents in that place almost. It is accepted as normal for youngsters to have sex before they are married. It's reported that only 5% of girls and 2% of boys go into their marriages with their purity intact. In 1974 a research firm surveyed 35,000 young people from the ages of 16-25, and the interviewer sought to learn from those selected individuals what they felt were important values in today's world. The study revealed that only 31% viewed pre-marital relationships as morally wrong, compared with 52% in 1969. Opposite to that, some saw abortion as perfectly acceptable and only 58% saw it as wrong, now it's 45%. The proportion who considered living a clean moral life as a very important value fell from 71% to 52% - and all of these falling statistics indicates to us, as the Church of Jesus Christ, that we are coming nearer and nearer to the days of Noah.

You only have to look at your television set to see that even now when they advertise ice-cream they do it in a suggestive way. What was considered pornography 30 years ago is now seen as legitimate advertising material. 'Leadership' is a magazine in the United States of America for pastors, for clergymen at large, no matter what denomination. And they commissioned a poll of all sorts of religious people, of 1000 pastors. It indicated within that poll that 12% of them had committed adultery while in the ministry, 23% did something that they considered as inappropriate - that is 1 in 8 pastors. They did a wider poll, not just to Christian workers but to people who call themselves Christians, and the statistics doubled - 23% said that they had committed adultery, and 45%, almost half, 1 in 2, had said that they had committed something inappropriate.

Well might the Lord have said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God'. The Psalmist asked the question, 'How can a young man', or for that matter an old man, or a young woman, 'cleanse his ways?'. How is it possible, in a sin sick world that we live in today - it is so evident to even the children of the devil that have not the light of God, they some of them, can even see the wickedness of our world today - how can a Christian possibly walk in righteousness and keep a pure life within his soul?

The heart that we have in our body is a very powerful organ. It's said that in one hour it produces enough work to lift a 150 pound man a top a 3 storey building. Scientists also tell us that in 12 hours the heart works enough to lift a 65 tonne tank off the ground 1 foot. It tells us again that in 70 years, the lifetime of most of us, that in 70 years the energy that the heart produces is enough to lift the world's biggest battleship right out of the ocean. Now that is our physical heart, but you see the word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and indeed throughout the word of God, when the word 'heart' is referred to, it doesn't refer to our physical heart but it refers to a greater heart. A heart that is greater than our physical heart with all the things that it can do - the greatest discovery is what our hearts, spiritually speaking, are capable of.

I want to ask one question first of all, as we look at this verse and what the Lord Jesus says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God'. What is He talking about? What is purity of heart? Now as I look at this beatitude the question comes to me: 'Well, why isn't this beatitude at the start? Surely if we are to walk a life of faith and a life beside Christ, surely we must be pure first of all to come near Him?'. Or perhaps if it's not at the start why is it not at the end? Because surely purity of heart is the result of everything that we would want to achieve in the Christian life? It could be seen by some in religious circles as to be the goal of all our Christian faith to end up with a pure heart. Well, like all the beatitudes it is in the middle, it is here where God has put it simply because the beatitudes are a progression. They are a spiritual progression, not to salvation - although they can be seen as such - but they are a spiritual progression to Christlikeness, and to the life that we find the kingdom to speak of within the word of God.

What do I mean? Well the first beatitude, you need to be poor in spirit, you need to realize that you are a sinner before you can come into a relationship with God. You need to mourn for your sin. If being poor in spirit is an intellectual knowledge, mourning for sin is an emotional knowledge where you feel the weight of your sin, you feel the painfulness and the dirtiness of it. The third beatitude - being meek - is to know that, because others around you are the same as yourself, you do not put yourself above them, you do not put them below you. The next beatitude would speak that because we know we are poor, because we mourn after our neediness, we know that we are hungry, we realize that we are thirsty and we cannot satisfy the spiritual need and the spiritual gap within ourselves by anything - only God can satisfy, so we come to God and we ask God to fill us. And we remember that when we have been shown mercy, we realize that we can do nothing else than but to show mercy to those around us.

It's only the person that has realized their sin. It's only the person that has come to Christ for His righteousness, for His salvation, that will ever come to the realization that they need to be pure in their heart - and without purity of heart they will never ever with their eyes see God Almighty. So what is this? It's not the goal of all Christian life. It's not something that we need before we become a Christian, because we can

never have it without it being in this progression. So what is it to be pure in heart? Well, first of all we need to understand what the Lord Jesus Christ means by 'heart' in this verse. We've already seen that He doesn't mean the physical heart. But the heart throughout all of Scripture is a name that is used for the centre, the pinnacle of all personality. It is who you are, it is the centre of your being, it incorporates the mind, but it is not just the mind. It incorporates the emotions, but it is not just the emotions. It includes the affections, but not just the affections and also the will - what you know you want to do and carrying it out. The heart encompasses, it is an inclusion of all these things together - and when we read in the word of God 'the heart', we can take it as meaning the whole person: body, soul, mind and spirit.

The Bible right from start to finish describes our heart's condition. If you would turn with me to Matthew chapter 15, the Lord speaks of what our hearts are like before a holy and a righteous God. It's not a pretty picture, it's not a picture that the self-righteous and self-religious smile at. Verse 18, and again disputing with the Pharisees as He was within the sermon of the mount He said: 'But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man'. You see, the Pharisees were walking around as Pharisees, as legalists, and everybody that put something dirty into their mouth, everybody that worked on the Sabbath, even drag a chair across the dust - it was seen as ploughing - anybody who did that, they had 360 odd rules that they'd made up themselves and if anybody broke those things, external rules, they were anathema to the Pharisees.

The Lord had come, and the Messiah - the Christ of God - had come with the message of God, and His message was a Gospel of the heart. It was not a Gospel of externals, and what the Lord was trying to get to these boys minds was this: 'It's not what you put into your body that defiles you, although you can do things that will defile you, but the primary problem is this: it is the heart'. Because of your heart's condition all these things that you do with your hands, that you look upon with your eyes, that you think up in your mind - they're not because someone has come along like a cartoon, the wee devil on your shoulder and it has whispered into your ear. They come out of you because they are ingrained within you. They're in your grain, they're in your very make-up, they're part of you - and out of your heart, out of your personality, out of your will, your affections, your emotions, who you are, all these things emanate and there's nothing you can do about it.

It's a sad picture, so much so that Jeremiah said that the heart is deceitful above all things - and when the Bible says above all things, it means above everything - and desperately wicked, who can know it? You know as well as I do that your heart often deceives you and what you feel often is not reality, it's not often the truth. The Psalmist was in this predicament in Psalm 24, and I want you to turn with me to it. Psalm 24, and it's as if that the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 5 and verse 8 were an answer to the Psalmist's rhetorical question. The Psalmist, hundreds of years before, in Psalm 24 is heralding down into the future, into the annals of time when Christ would come, shouting to Christ this question, and Christ is answering it within the beatitudes. Verse 3: 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?' - the answer - 'He that hath clean hands, a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, the righteousness from the God of his salvation'.

The Psalmist asked the question of all time: 'Who can come unto God? Who can approach God? What is the road to approaching the hill of God? What is the highway?'. Isaiah says that it is the 'highway of holiness'. The Psalmist says that 'it is him that hath clean hands and a pure heart'. The Lord Jesus says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God'. But you could be like me, and you look at all this, and you could be like David in Psalm 51 and he asked the question and in his sin, in his adultery, in his murder, he asked God to cleanse his heart: 'Lord cleanse me from secret sins', says the Psalmist. And David, if you turn to it very quickly in Psalm 51, there's so many questions about his sin, but what he longs for is cleansing - and in verse

6: 'Behold', he says, '[God] thou desirest truth in the inward parts'. It's not what a person wears or what a person says, or what a person looks like, or whether they have a beard or whether they don't have a beard - and believe you me that's the kind of things they argued about here. Those things God is not concerned with! 'You desire truth within the inward parts, Lord: and in the hidden parts Thou shall make me to know wisdom' - then in verse 10: 'Create in me a clean heart O God; and renew a right spirit within me'.

Do you know what Martin Luther, the great reformer, said? He said, 'I am more afraid of my own heart than the pope and all his cardinals'. He knew the dynamite that was in his own heart. The prophets longed for clean hearts, that's why in Ezekiel they talked about a day that would come when Christ would come, when their stony hardened hearts would be replaced with a heart, a new heart of flesh that beat after God. They looked in Jeremiah to a heart that would have the law of God written upon it, no longer would the law of God be written on their heads in a wee box, or on their hands, but it would be written in their hearts.

There's two incentives that come from a pure heart. You see, the purity of heart that the Lord Jesus Christ was speaking of speaks to me of two things. First of all: it speaks of inward purity rather than outward purity. And secondly: it speaks of single-mindedness. First of all: inward purity rather than outward purity. Christ's Gospel was a Gospel of the heart, not of the head. The heart was the problem, not the head. Now what is in your head is important, but what is in your head will ultimately flow out from what is in your heart. Christianity is about the heart. Christianity without the heart is legalism. Christianity without the head is liberality. You need God in your heart and then you'll have the right doctrine in your head. This was the dispute with the Pharisees, this is what the Lord was arguing about. He was saying: 'Blessed are the pure in heart', but they were saying: 'Blessed are those who are outwardly, ceremonially clean, because those that are externally holy will see their God'. But Jesus said: 'You're clean on the outside, but in the very depths of your being, in your emotion, in your intellect, in your affections, in your will, in everything that makes you a person, in your heart, you're dead'. Remember when Saul was chosen as the king: he was tall, dark and handsome, he had everything going for him in the world's perspective. But do you know what had to happen? God had to change his heart! Because God said: 'Man looks on the outward appearance, but I look upon the heart'.

The Sermon on the Mount has the backdrop, where the Lord Jesus is saying right throughout it, through every verse that we have read, and every verse that you could read from chapter 5, 6 and 7 of this sermon: 'Heart righteousness is what God wants, rather than rule righteousness'. Listen to this, let this get into your head for this is the Gospel: God is not concerned about rules, God is concerned about the righteousness of His Son in your life. And righteous living will flow out of the righteousness of Christ in your life, so that you'll not need rules. But also this purity of heart speaks of single-mindedness. What do I mean by that? Well, this fits in with the context of the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. If you turn to chapter 6 of Matthew, the next chapter, chapter 6 and verse 22, we see that what the Lord is trying to do, it's as if He's going through a jungle with a machete and He's trying to cut away all the overgrowth, and He's leading to one specific plant which is God's righteousness and God's righteousness alone that will satisfy. Therefore in this chapter, in verse 22, He says this: 'The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light'. What's the Lord saying? He's saying that if you're to come into the kingdom, if you're to have success within God's Church, and in God's life of sanctified holiness that He will give to you: [you] must be single-minded, you must be focused.

The scholar Mr. Tasker put it like this: 'It is the single-minded one who is free from the tyranny of a divided self'. Now come on, let's be honest, aren't we divided? It seems that there is a battle raging within us everyday of our lives, and that's simply because our old nature is still with us - we have a new nature, yes, but there's a fight, there's a battle that goes on day by day and it's whatever nature we feed that will win the day! As Watchman Nee said: 'Often it has to do with what I decide when I get out of my bed in the morning, who's going to have the victory within me the new nature or the old'. You know what I'm talking about: the

things that you do, like Paul, that you wouldn't do, you wish you couldn't do - and the things that you wish you could do but you can't do, you can't bring yourself to do it. The Lord Jesus is saying that this purity of heart is not simply moral purity - it includes that - but what He is talking about is, as J.B. Phillips translated this verse: 'Blessed are those who are utterly sincere'. Are you? We all sin, we're all going to sin - but are we trying our best, by the help of the Holy Spirit in our will, to try and live a life that is pleasing to God, or are we double-minded - and James says that a man who is double-minded is unstable in all of his ways. You'll get nowhere as a Christian - and that's why many of you are getting nowhere as a Christian, because you haven't tamed the lion of lust, you haven't tamed the fire of hell from your tongue, you haven't tamed your murderous hating thoughts within your soul! You haven't tamed all those things and unless you tame them, and you decide that no longer are you going to be double minded, you will never ever be pure in your heart.

What did Paul say? - and I think this is marvelous. He said: 'This one thing I do' - he didn't say 'This ten things, or dozen things I do'. We, as Christians, can be running around doing a dozen things - Paul says there's one thing I'm going to do and that's press towards God's mark. Concentrate on one thing, do it well, and let that one thing be this: seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Jesus is saying in this verse: to be pure in heart is to live one life for Christ, and live it open to all around you. It is being free from hypocrisy, being free from falsehood, not simply walking into this hall, or into whatever church you attend and pretending everything is alright, pretending you're the holiest of all in the holiest of all, when you know deep down that things are not right before God.

The easy answer to this question is: What does your mind think of when it goes into neutral? What tidbits does your mind feed upon? Young men what do you watch on the television late into the night? For these things cannot add to a pure heart. The Greek for purity that the Lord Jesus uses is the word 'cathiros' (sp?). It was a word used in Greek literature to describe clean drinking water, the grain that had been winnowed, all the dirt and chaff had been taken away. It was used to describe feelings that are unmixed, it was used to describe metals that were untainted. And you know examples of this word, medical examples are: 'cathartic', something that is used to clean an infected area. Psychologists and psychiatrists, if you go to them and have a counseling session with them it's sometimes called a 'catharsis' - a cleansing of the soul and the mind. A 'catheter' - you all know what that is. To cleanse, to make pure, to have not just purity of heart in a moral sense, but fidelity towards God, an unswerving loyalty to the things of God, to the will of God, to the word of God. To be simple, to be single in your devotion, not to be divided.

One illustration of this: have you ever talked to someone and they start talking to you, maybe after the meeting, and they're talking away - and they're looking all around them, and they're looking at what she's wearing, what he's saying, and what car he's getting into - and you're standing there and you know fine well that, as they're talking to you, they would rather not be there. They're not concentrating on you - now, that can be like us. We are not single-minded and single-hearted, we are not focused to our Christian lives, we're not really interested! Now as you look at this verse, and you see Christ saying to you and to me: 'Be pure of heart', you despair, and I despair! Because this is nigh impossible - in fact it is impossible! You cannot do it - with the heart that you have, and with the heart that I have, it is absolutely impossible. Yet the Lord says in verse 48 of our chapter, chapter 5: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'. You see, in Christianity, perfection is the goal - and nothing else will satisfy God but perfection.

Do you know what the bad news is? (Apart from the fact that my time's running out terribly!). The bad news is this: that all of us are disqualified. I don't care how long you're saved, I don't care how good a preacher you are, or how much of the word of God you use, every single one in this place, whether you're saved or unsaved, are disqualified from qualifying for a pure heart.

You see, there are several types of purity - and secondly, I want to look as quickly as possible at the fact that the pure, the Lord Jesus Christ says, shall see God. They will see God, and without purity - and none of you

can have purity, by the way, of yourselves - you will never see God. Thomas Manton put it like this, the old puritan: 'God alone sees the heart and the heart alone sees God, and it is the pure heart alone that sees God'. The book of Hebrews says this, a declaration upon all humanity, that 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord'. First of all what you need, and especially if you're not saved in this place today, you need positional purity. What is that? That is where God grabs you by the scruff of your neck, spiritually speaking, He lifts you out of your sin, He plants you in Christ Jesus and in the middle of His righteousness. And when God looks at you He no longer sees your impurity, but He sees Christ's purity. That's salvation, and He purchased it at the cross, where He became your impurity that you might have His purity. You can have it now by faith in Christ! But for the Christian this is not positional purity, but this is practical purity. That this is the only way, as a born again believer, you're going to come to see God. Imagine the day, believers, imagine the day when you will go to heaven, and you will see not the face that men and women saw when they were down here on earth, but you will see the glorified Christ. Imagine that day: the *summum bonum*, the greatest thing in all eternity, the greatest joy that will transcend all the accumulated pleasures that this world or even eternity can bring, it will be ecstasy to see Christ as He is with 20/20 vision of God!

Now, the debate has raged throughout Christian history about whether we will see God, or whether anyone has seen God. Some said of Moses that he saw God, well he saw the back of God - I don't know what that means - but it says that he didn't actually see God. There are many theophanies - which means a revealing of God in the Old Testament, like the burning bush where God's voice came out. Yet of all these pictures and symbols and demonstrations of God, 1 John 4:12 still says: 'No man has seen God at any time', and even though Moses endured as seeing the invisible he didn't see, in a form, God. But listen, the Lord Jesus Christ comes, as He said in this chapter, to fill up the prophets and the laws. He puts the full stop upon all that has been said in the Old Testament, and He says this: 'No one has seen God at any time, but let Me tell you this: those that are pure in heart shall see God' - and that is emphatic: only those that are in pure hearts will see God. But it's also continual: those that are pure in their hearts, they alone will see God, but they will see God continually. Isn't that powerful?

Helen Keller was a blind girl, she was also deaf. She was asked rather forcibly on one occasion: 'Isn't it terrible to be blind?'. Do you know what she replied to that? 'It's better to be blind and see with your heart, than have two eyes and see nothing'. Christian, what do you see with your heart? Do you see the purity of Christ, the righteousness of Christ? We can see God in His total being, everything that He is, in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can see Him by faith in His Son, we can see Him by faith within the word of God, His revelation of His being, we can see Him in His world - we can see Him, if we're saved, in our very lives! The hymnwriter said:

'Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen'.

Job said: 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye hath seen Thee'. Christian, have you seen God lately? Have you seen God at all? The ultimate event of all eternity will be when we see, after looking through a glass darkly, we will see Him - and when we see Him, praise God, we will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is! Job's testimony was this, in all his pain - and I'm nearly finished, just bear with me - in all his pain, in chapter 19 and verse 25-27, he says this: 'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God'.

Do you want to be pure, Christian? Non-Christian, do you want to see God one day? Do you want to be cleansed? Do you want to be freed from your sin? Zechariah 13 and verse 1 says that there is a fountain open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness, so that you can wash it away. The sermon in Acts 15:9 he told the people: 'Purify your hearts by faith' - and if you want to be

cleansed today you've to go to that fountain by faith and be washed in the blood of Christ. For the blood and nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, can cleanse us from all sin. Christian, do you want to be pure in your heart? First of all you need to be honest with God about your heart. You need to acknowledge to God that only He can make it pure, you need to fill yourself with God's word, for He has said that it's through His word that He has made us clean. You need to think of your eternity, the hope that is within us that keeps us alive, that keeps us going: that one day we will see Him and we will be like Him.

'Newsweek' has written about a microphone that they have devised that will eradicate all stethoscopes that the doctors use to sound our hearts. What they're going to do with it, they're going to put it up our veins, right into our heart, and they can get right into the centre of our heart to hear our hearts condition. Christian, if you could hear as the Holy Spirit hears your heart condition this morning, what's it like? Can I give you an exhortation as I close? Solomon said: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life'.

Our Father, we have heard so many times over this week: 'Blessed are they, blessed are they, blessed are they'. But Lord, we have heard today something that shakes us again to our core: 'Blessed are they that are pure in heart: for they shall see God'. Lord, let there not be one in this place that is not positionally pure in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. But Lord, help us each, by Thy grace and by Thy Holy Spirit, to be more blessed and holy - more, Saviour, like Thee. Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 9

"Blessed Are The Peacemakers"

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That was good singing. Now, turn with me in your Bibles to the passage that we've been looking at for quite some time now, Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5, and we've now reached the seventh beatitude, and we'll read all of the beatitudes again.

Beginning from verse 3 of chapter 5: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God". This is today's: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" - blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Let us pray, just for a moment, as we ask God's help for His word today. Our Father, we thank Thee for Thy truth, we thank Thee that it is the word of God - we say it so often, but help us never, oh God, to take it for granted. What we hold in our hands, what is written upon these pages, are God-breathed words from the heart of Almighty Deity. Lord, we need Thy Spirit today, I need to be filled with the Spirit of God, we need to be touched and spoken to by the Spirit of God, each one today. Lord, we do believe - we have to believe - that this is Thy word for us this morning, so help us to receive it as Thy word. Lord, help us not just to receive it, but to believe it and to obey it, and to live it in our daily lives, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.

'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God'. It's true to say that almost everyone in the world wants peace, isn't that true? In war-torn countries, in broken marriages, in families where there's strife and contention, in all sorts of relationships and nations, people want peace. It's also interesting that people all over the world want to be called 'the children of God'. Isn't that true? If they believe there is a God, if they believe in a deity, in an Almighty God whom they worship - whether he's the right God or not, or whether he's the true God - they want to class themselves as the children of God. Of course, the clarion cry that comes from every corner the world today is that 'we are all the children of God' - no matter who we or what we believe.

This is, perhaps, the least contentious Beatitude in all of the Beatitudes that we will study in this chapter. Although it is perhaps the least contentious, it is the one with universal appeal, that almost everybody wants peace and almost everybody wants to be called a child of God. It's interesting that over recorded history of 4000 years, only 300 of those 4000 years have been without a major war. Some writer has been quoted as saying this: 'Peace is merely that brief, glorious, moment in history when everyone stops to reload their weapons'. Isn't that true? 4000 years of recorded history, we don't know what it was like before then, but there's only been 300 years where there has been comparative peace.

We don't need to look at the history books, we only need to look at the word of God. If we go to the book of Genesis and we look at this character Noah, we read in Genesis chapter 6 and verse 11 that the earth was filled with violence. That's why God had to come, and God had to bring a flood upon the world and destroy all creatures except for Noah and his family, because they found grace in the eyes of the Lord. You could go from Noah, and then you could go to David in Psalm 55, and he says: 'I have seen violence and strife in the

city' - and it was probably the city of Jerusalem. You could go to Asaph in Psalm 73, and he says that violence covereth all things like a garment. The whole world, as it were, wears as its clothing violence! Ezekiel said it, in Ezekiel 7:23 he said: 'The land' - and our land - 'is full of bloody crimes!' Solomon, the wisest man, said in Proverbs 15: 'The soul of the transgressor shall eat violence'.

It's described as the clothing of our world, it's described as the land being covered in bloody crimes - that blood, like the rain, has saturated all of this world - it's described as transgressors using violence, and having violence as their daily meat and drink - it's their diet! We learnt some time ago that what we eat, we are. When we eat violence, when we feast with our eyes on the television, or on the videos, of violence we'll become what we feast upon - what we eat! Seventy times in the Old Testament Scriptures this word 'violence' is used. When we come to the book of Malachi, and it's the end of the Old Testament, and before the New Testament there are 400 years of interim - yet in those 400 years there were five bloody wars for the city of Jerusalem.

As the Lord Jesus speaks here in this sermon, He says to these people: 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God' - what a message it was to them! It was so appropriate, it was so contemporary, they were looking on their Jewish history of war and blood, and they were looking on the past 400 years since God spoke to them last, and there had been five wars for the city in which they were in at this moment. Is it any wonder He said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers'?

Now note, before we go any further, what the Lord Jesus is not saying. He's not saying: 'Blessed are those who are of a peaceful disposition' - that's not what He's saying. He's not even saying: 'Blessed are those who yearn, or want, or desire, or whose aspirations are peace'. He's not saying: 'Blessed are those who are easy going - laissez-faire'. He's not saying: 'Blessed are those who want peace, or who would bring peace at any price', or, 'Blessed are those who would compromise', or, 'Blessed are those who would try to avoid trouble, not rock the boat'. It doesn't even mean: 'Blessed are those, or those countries, or those sects, or societies, or individuals, who have an appearance of peace'. You see, an appearance of peace may only be an absence of war - and that's not what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying here. And He's not saying: 'Blessed are those who live and let live, those who are tolerant in society and who say: 'Well as long as it doesn't harm me and my family, and I can get on with my life, well that's alright''. That is not what this verse means.

So, what does it mean? Well, as we looked, we saw that in chapter 5 all of these beatitudes are a progression. They're like a ladder, they lead one to another - when you go up the first rung, you naturally come to the second rung and so on. The last Beatitude that we thought about, some weeks ago, was 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God' - and it would be natural, wouldn't it, to think that those who are pure in heart - and we saw that that meant pure in motive and sincerity, as well as moral purity - we would imagine that they would be people who would be peacemakers and could be called the children of God. We could say that peacemaking might come naturally from those that are pure in heart, but does it?

Let's look at the first thing that I want to bring to your attention this morning, it's this: the problem of peace. The problem of peace. You see, the congregation that the Lord Jesus Christ had at this message, at this sermon, many of them expected from Him a military, a national, a materialistic kingdom of Messiah that He would bring - that He would defeat the Romans, that He would set up His kingdom there. You remember in John chapter 6 that, after the great miracle that He performed, it says that they would've made Him a king. He spent so much of His ministry telling them that He wasn't going to be an earthly king in the sense in which they had conceived of, but He would be the King of their hearts - His kingdom would be in their hearts, that was the kingdom that He was establishing at that moment in time.

So why would these peacemakers be blessed? This is turning everything on its head again. They thought that He was coming as a man of war, to conquer their enemies, and to set up the society that they had longed for

for so long - so how could peacemakers, in their eyes, be blessed? Well, to put it simply today: peacemakers are blessed because they are so much unlike everyone else. Think about that for a moment: so unlike the norm, the uniform in our society. Because peace making, although it's the thing that everybody wants, it's the most unnatural thing for the human race to have or do. Secular pacifists cry for it, they love to quote - I heard Clinton quoting it at our City Hall some years ago - 'Blessed are the peacemakers'. It's the clarion call of politics, of religion, of philosophy - yet it's the most unnatural thing for a human being. Many say: 'This is the real Gospel. This is the real good news, to love thy neighbour, to love thine enemy, to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Blessed are the peacemakers - this is the real message!'. Yet it's so hard to do, and if the humanity that cried about it and agreed to it actually adhered to it, do you know what we would have? We would have world peace from corner of the earth to corner!

So, what is the reason, if everybody longs after peace and peace making, what is the reason for so much strife, for so much tension, bitterness, conflict, violence, bloodshed and war across our nation and across our world? Why is peace the most significant word in human vocabulary, yet it's one of the most elusive words in human experience? Why? I fear that the answer to this question is the answer to all the questions that we have heard week after week, as we have looked at this passage of Scripture. The problem of peace - what is the problem of peace? What is the question mark over the issue of peace? This: the human heart, the human heart is the heart of the problem!

Albert Einstein, he won the Nobel peace price for physics in 1921 - you remember, the theory of relativity. In one of his lectures in 1948 he commented on the threat of nuclear warfare, and this is what he said, and I'm quoting him: 'It is not a physical problem, but an ethical one. What terrifies us is not the explosive force of the atomic bomb, but the power of the wickedness of the human heart - its explosive power for evil! Turn with me for a moment to James chapter 4. James typifies for us here exactly the real problem to all our problems, James chapter 4 and verse 1 and 2. He's asking the question that we have been asking here - where do wars come from? 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war' - he's asking the question: 'Where is all this strife, where is all this contention, where is all the battling and the bloodshed and war coming from? What motivates it? Where is the seed of its origin?'. 'It comes from inside you', James says. He uses this word your 'desires': 'Ye lust', verse 2, 'and have not: ye kill, and desire to have' - your desires, your wants, your lusts, your aspirations, that is the problem - the heart!

Now, as a Christian here - or as a non-Christian: are your desires not what you battle with from day-to-day? Is that not what the battle's with? Your desires that are within you, and there seems to be a world war day by day that is raging in your soul, in your breast. Evil wants to win, good wants to win - and continually there is this war going on! It's interesting that the Greek word that James uses for 'desires' is the word 'hedonis' - 'hedonis'! It's the word that we derive the word 'hedonism' from - and hedonism is simply the doctrine of everyone doing as they want to do, that self-satisfaction and gratification is all that is important. Isn't that what our desires are? The problem is 'I trouble' - 'I want this, I want that. I feel like this. I want to exhaust my desires, my passions, my instincts, on what I desire'. Is that not the cry of our whole world today? Every conflict in humanity - whether it be from a conflict in marriage, in a broken relationship, right to a world war - all of them stem from the same problem! The Lord Jesus - we've looked at it in weeks gone by in Mark chapter 7 - He said what? 'From the heart comes murderings, and adulteries, and fornication, and strife' - from the heart! It's not like you Pharisees say, it's not like the scribes and the religious theologians say: that if you take this, or you wear this, or you eat that, or you go here, or you think something, that that makes you sinful - He says that's not the case! It's not what goes into the body that makes a man defiled, but it's your heart, it's your heart, it's your heart!

This is the message of the sermon on the mount. And if I've preached eight messages by the end of this and you haven't got this message, I have failed! What God is saying, and what the Lord Jesus was bringing to

these Pharisees, was that the heart is the heart of the problem! Unless you sort out the heart, you still have the problem. In Galatians 5 we have a list of the fruit of the Spirit, but we also have a list of what Paul says are the works of the flesh which are manifest. The works of the heart, the things that the heart conjures up, but they're manifest in the flesh - you can go home and look at them in Galatians 5, and they're the direct antithesis of everything that is of the Spirit of God, they're the opposite! After Adam sinned - this is what it all goes back to in the garden of Eden, after he disobeyed God and he took of that fruit from his wife and he ate of it, the Bible says that sin and death came upon all men - but in the same way as when God made him from the dust, He made him in His image...after Adam had sinned every man, woman, boy or girl after that was made in likeness of Adam, and in the image of Adam! Every lineage and every genealogy since, every boy and every girl, every baby - no matter how young or seemingly innocent - the tragedy is this: every one of them since then, humanity has been a continual river of rebellion ever since - and man was a trouble maker from the beginning, and he will be a trouble maker ever since! Why? Because the problem of peace is the problem of the heart.

Now, let's deal with something here - I think this is important. We hear talk about 'free will'. The question is this: does man have free will? Think about it, does he? Does a sinful man, or woman, or boy, or girl really have free will? Now, let's think about it, because do you know what free will is? There is a law in this universe, one of them is gravity - and I could get up into the choir box, and I could jump off it and flap my arms as hard as I can, but I'll not fly! Now, I've never tried it (and I'm not going to), but I guarantee you that I'll not fly. I'll not fly, why? There is a law in the universe that matter must go down, a force. So, I have not free will to do I want in that regard, isn't that true? There are laws in our universe which we cannot apprehend, we cannot across certain lines that God has drawn. It's exactly the same in the spiritual world - and to a certain extent there is no free will because a man is not totally free to choose his actions, but he is forced, just like the natural laws, he is forced by the spiritual laws within him and the laws, spiritually speaking, in the world to behave in certain ways.

Is that not what Paul said in Romans chapter 7, you don't need to turn to it for a moment, but listen to it. Romans 7:23, he was despairing because was something in him that made him do things, and he said: 'But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members'. Oh, there's no free will for a sinner. Have you ever seen a sinner stop sinning? Many of them wanted to, didn't they? They've tried to, and they've done everything to do it - but Paul says, and God says, that there's a law which means that we do even things that we don't want to do, it forces us to do it! I've said it before on Sunday evenings, this is a fact, in the same way as a sinner can't stop sinning - no matter how much he tries, the word of God says he's a slave to sin - in the same way, the one who is sitting and God is speaking to, don't you think for one moment that he is obliged to call on God when he wants! Maybe you're here this morning, and maybe you're not saved, and perhaps you're unconverted, and perhaps you've heard the Gospel over and over again, and you believe in your heart: 'Well, I'll get saved when I want to. I'll get saved when I feel like it. I'll get saved when everything is right for me to get saved' - but the word of God teaches that you have to get saved when God is calling! You can only answer God when God speaks to you!

The problem is the problem of the heart. The heart is the problem of all things, and as we look at this Beatitude we can see that it's absolutely fatal, as we've looked week after week, to think that we ourselves, of ourselves, can do these things, that we can perform these things, that we can achieve things for ourselves. Remember we looked at hungering and thirsting after righteousness? We saw that if we tried to pour righteousness into our life - like the Pharisees, which was an external righteousness, we do good works, we say prayers, we sing hymns, we try and act all 'holy' - but if we do that we're not hungering and thirsting after righteousness, because to hunger and thirst after righteousness means that only God can satisfy your righteousness! Only God can make a peacemaker, and only God can make peace with men - because if we're to have peace outwardly, we must have peace within our hearts. That's the point, that's the whole point of the

Beatitudes: that if we're to have anything from God, if we are to have anything in life that is divine or is spiritual - 'I must die! Oh, that we would get that! Do you see if you got that, child of God, you would soar to heights that you couldn't even imagine! If you realised that there's to be another cross to the cross of Christ, where you are nailed!

An old monk was asked on one occasion: 'What does it mean to be crucified with Christ?'. And he answered it like this - and he was a believer - he said this: 'A man who is crucified is facing only one way - and a man who is on a cross, someone else makes their plans for them'. Is that the way you're living? For that is the way we can only live if we're to be blessed of God, for God says: 'Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed are all these types of people who die to themselves and live unto God'!

The word for 'peace' is the word 'Shalom' - you might have been to Jerusalem and got a wee piece of wood with 'Shalom' written on it - it means peace. It's more than simply the absence of war or strife. It's not just a negative thing, that there's no fighting or no bickering, but it's a positive thing. It means not just the absence of war, but the presence of something special, a wholeness, a feeling and an attitude of absolute well-being. When you look at the state of man, is there not a need for this? Is there not? Peace for broken, tormented minds. Peace for terrible, ripped apart homes. Peace for reputations that have been smarted through lust and degradation. Peace [for] lands that have been ripped by ethnic cleansing, and sectarianism, and murder, and rape. Peace for a world that is dying! Oh, sure, we need it more than ever!

But ever since man's declaration of independence from God, the word of God says that he has been God's enemy. There's been no peace between God and man since Adam took of that fruit in the garden - and the book of Romans testifies to it, that the carnal mind is enmity against God. But it's worse than that, because not only have we declared ourselves the enemies of God, but God declared Himself the enemy of man. That's the truth, that our sins and our iniquities have separated between us and our God, we have become - through the garden of Eden, through our forefather - the object of divine anger, divine wrath, divine hostility. And we, as we sit as a sinner unsaved, we're totally depraved in every area and every facet of our lives. Every area is not depraved as it might be, but every area is tainted by sin. Do you know what Jonathan Edwards said? He said: 'The unconverted man would kill God if he could get his hands on him' - isn't that right?

The problem of the heart is the problem of peace, but I want you to see that there is the Prince of peace! The Gospel, the good news, the glorious message of a Redeemer, of a Saviour, is the wondrous solution to a heart that is beyond remedy, to the heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, to the heart that has the enmity and the wrath of God abiding upon it - the Gospel is the only answer! Turn with me quickly to 2 Corinthians and chapter 5, 2 Corinthians and chapter 5 and verse 19. This is the message, what a problem we are all in until we realise, like the man going to the doctor, that there's something wrong - he finds a lump, or he has a sore head, or he has a limp, or he has a pain in his chest - until he feels that and he knows something is wrong he can't go for the remedy. But God says in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 19: 'To wit', to know, 'that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation' - can you see it? This is beautiful: we are the enemies of God, and because of our sin God has become our enemy, but because the love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell, because it stretches to the highest heaven and reaches to the depths of hell, God - now grasp this - God our enemy was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. He came in the form of flesh, that we're remembering at the moment, He clothed Himself in the likeness of sinful flesh, and came to humanity to die - not imputing your sins to you, or my sins to me, but imputing the sins of a rebellious world at enmity with Him unto His beloved Son. Boy, can you grasp this?

'Jesus loves me - never you forget that, child of God
This I know,
For the Bible tells me so'.

This is wonderful, because if you go into the word of God and you go to Colossians - you don't need to turn to it, we haven't time - but if you go to Colossians in chapter 1, you read about it. What has happened through the cross, verse 21: 'And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled' - what a peace process that is! - 'reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight'. In 2 Corinthians 5, we'll read again, verse 20 and 21: 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ', verse 21, 'for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him'. Then in Ephesians, we read it again, Ephesians 2 and verse 14: 'For he is our peace', He is our peacemaker, 'who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man...that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby'.

Can I say this to anybody who's here, and you're not saved: do you see what Christ has done for you? Do you? Do you see the love of God for you? How Christ came, and God was in Christ, to bring you who were away from Him, who were damned by Him, to bring you to Himself and to love you as His Son. Oh, it is wonderful, it is too wonderful to be! The word of God says that, because of that, every type of barrier, every type of wall in the church of Jesus Christ is gone. There's neither Jew, there's neither Greek, there's neither bond, there's neither free, there's neither male nor female - ye are all one in Christ Jesus! That doesn't mean everybody does the same thing, but what it does mean in regards to salvation, and in regards to how far you can go with God: no-one is barred. It's no wonder, on that first Christmas Day, that they came and they said - what did the angels say? 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom God's favour rests'.

But let's look quickly at the pain of peace. We see the precedent for peace, who is the Prince of peace, He's our example, He's the one whom we ought to follow - but there is the pain of peace. We read in 2 Corinthians 5 that because of the reconciliation that has been made for us by God to bring us to Himself, we ought to be ambassadors of reconciliation. What does that mean? Isaiah put it like this: 'How beautiful are the feet of him that brings good news, who publishes peace' - isn't that right? Whoever brings the message of the Prince of peace is publishing the message of peace, and you're an ambassador of reconciliation. That will cause pain, because there is pain in peace, and the Gospel has to wound before it can heal. In other words, you've got to go to the law - that schoolmaster that'll knock you into shape to realise that you can't do it, and all the sins and iniquities of your past and your present have to be raked up till you face them, and the Holy Ghost does that - furrowing the ground in order to put the seed in. So there has to be, before peace, there has to be a fight.

You see, this isn't peace at any price, this isn't a papering over of the cracks, that when the rain comes and when the water runs down the wall it'll all cave in - that's not what it is. But this is breaking up that plaster of that wall, and plastering it over again - making a new creation in Christ Jesus! That's what it is, but it's painful. Not only is that process of salvation and sanctification painful, we're not only to be reconciled to God, we're not only to take the message of reconciliation to a dying world, but we're to be reconciled with one another. See that passage that we read from, 2 Corinthians 5? It's often preached on, verse 21 and 22, as a gospel message - and that's OK, you can do that. But do you know what the primary meaning of this passage is? The Corinthians were torn asunder, not through reconciliation, but through war and strife and bickering and fighting and backbiting! Paul was coming to them and saying to them: 'Listen! Be reconciled to God, and be reconciled to your fellow men'.

Oh, we'll say 'Amen' to the message of reconciliation to God, won't we? But it's painful to go to somebody that we've hurt, and it's painful to go to somebody that we've talked about, and it's painful even to go to

somebody who we know has been talking about us, and have reconciliation with them and put peace between us, and be peacemakers - and as Philippians says, esteem one another better than ourselves - why? Because it is putting to death ourselves, and that's painful, it's not natural! The old puritan Cotton Mather (sp?), he received a bundle of letters - poison pen letters - do you know what he did? He put them up on his shelf and he wrapped around them this label: 'Father forgive them'. Are you a peacemaker?

Quickly, as we finish, do you know how you can be a peacemaker? You find it in Colossians 3 and verse 15, we read this: 'Let the peace of God rule in your hearts'. You see that wee word 'rule' in the Greek, do you know what it's the word for? It's the word for an umpire within sports. Now, what does an umpire do? An umpire is not seen or heard until the rules are broken, isn't that right? Therefore in the Christian life, in the Christian walk, when we are walking in the Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, when we're walking in peace with our God and peace with men and women around us, the whistle of the referee won't blow! But when the whistle blows, the peace is gone, and we're not a peacemaker.

You see, there's the problem of peace which is the heart. There's the Prince of peace which is the Saviour. There's the pain of peace which is the cost. But look at this: there is the paternity of peace - 'they shall be called the children of God'. Now, that should be translated more accurately: 'the sons of God', because in the word of God to call someone your son means this: that they are a bearer of your image. If you're a peacemaker, child of God, and you have made peace with God, if you publish peace through the word of God and the Gospel day by day, if you make peace with one another and brethren that are in schisms and broken through argument - you're like your Father in heaven!

Can I ask you, as I close: have you made peace with God? Christian, are you publishing the peace of God? Believer, are you practising the peace of God? The writer to the Hebrews concludes it all like this: 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord'.

As your head is bowed, consider the question: are you reconciled with God? He has done everything to reconcile Himself to thee. What have you done for Him? Are you publishing the message of peace? And are you practising the message of reconciliation? I know that there are so many Christians, and they have been turned off the gospel of Jesus Christ because of bickering brethren. I wonder has God touched your heart today about something that's not right with your brother or sister in Christ? May God help you and give you the grace to obey His word.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the peace of God that passeth all understanding, that was bought through the sacrifice of His peace on the cross of Calvary. What pain He endured, what sorrow He bore, that we might have the peace, and peace with God. Lord, we pray that we would take the exhortation of Thy servant John: 'Brethren, love one another, even as Christ has loved you'. May we go in love, and may the world look at us and see the love that is in us, and see the love of God for them in Christ Jesus. So we ask Thy blessing as we part one from the other, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

The Beatitudes - Chapter 10

"Blessed Are The Persecuted"

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Now as I said we're turning in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel again, for the last time, as we look at the Beatitudes together - this sermon of the Lord Jesus Christ that is full of so many truths that we've been learning about week after week. We'll take time this morning, in our conclusion of this series, to read all of the Beatitudes together from verse 1 of chapter 5.

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was sat down, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you".

Let us pray together: Our Father in heaven, we thank Thee for Thy truth. We thank Thee that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and Lord we have found in these past weeks as we have studied in this passage of scripture, that it has all been profitable to us. Some of it may have been hard to take for us, as we have looked at ourselves through the mirror of Thy truth and we've seen what we are - not what we think we are, but what we truly are in Thy sight. Lord, we have been shocked at times as we have seen the standard of our God and all His holiness, and we say with Paul in the book of Romans, that there's no difference between any of us, because we've all sinned and fallen short of that great standard of glory. Lord, help us today as we conclude this study of Thy word, that You'll speak to us again by Thy Spirit - Lord, that You'll come to us afresh and breathe life into our souls, and challenge us, encourage us, rebuke us if we need it. Lord, mend our wounds if we're bleeding. But Lord, whatever our need be today, meet it we ask, and fill us by Thy Spirit we pray by the preaching of the word of God. For we ask these things in Jesus precious name, Amen.

We're looking at verse 10, verse 11, and verse 12: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you".

These three verses that we have read, I believe anyway, makes up the eighth Beatitude. We've looked at the first seven of them, but as we look at the eighth Beatitude in verses 10 to 12, we see that there's a difference between this one and the first seven of them. It seems that there are three differences, first of all, between this Beatitude and the rest of them. It seems to be singled out, to be important. It is of supreme importance to the church of Jesus Christ, and as the Lord Jesus Christ stands and preaches this sermon to His followers, He wants to emphasise to them that this last concluding Beatitude is of supreme importance.

How do we know that? Well, first of all: it's repeated. We find it in verse 10: 'Blessed are they which are persecuted', and then in verse 11 the Lord seems to repeat Himself: 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you'. He is emphasising the importance of this particular Beatitude. But secondly, we know it's of supreme importance because in verse 10 we see this, He says: 'Blessed are they which are persecuted' - yet in verse 11 the person is changed from 'they' to 'you': 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you'. All the rest of the Beatitudes were given in the person 'they', but the Lord wants to emphasise this one to us today, and to His disciples who were listening to Him on this day on the mount. He says to them: 'Blessed are you' - this is important, that you listen to this and you take note of this Beatitude. Thirdly, not just the repetition or the person, but there's the position of the Beatitude: it's the very last Beatitude - and it's almost as if this is the pinnacle, the climax, of what the Lord Jesus has been saying to His disciples and to the others that listened to the sermon on the mount. He says to you: 'Blessed are ye if you follow this truth from the word of God'.

This is important that we note this Beatitude, for the Lord Jesus has emphasised it to us as we stand at the threshold of a future that no one knows, as we stand at the future of a new century, a new millennium, day by day we have new opportunities - like a blank page before us, we can write our futures so to speak. As we stand here, not just as human beings on this planet, but as we stand among that cloud of witnesses that have gone before us and that remain here upon the earth, of the children in the church of God, what a message - what a message for us today!

What does this little word 'persecute' mean? In the Greek language it comes from the root idea 'to pursue', it means to chase after something - it's like the hounds chasing after the fox, to chase them, to run them down into the ground, and then to go in for the kill. A good translation of this word is to 'harass'. The Lord Jesus is saying: 'Blessed are they which are harassed. Blessed are you when men shall harass you, revile you, and persecute you'. Verse 11 talks about insults, about people - and the idea is literally 'things being thrown in your teeth' - face-to-face assaults from those in the world, from our enemies, from the very Devil himself. The Lord is talking about such persecution that perhaps many of us here today have never ever known in our lifetime.

Now we, as we looked into the word of God in past weeks at these beatitudes, we've seen week after week how it has been so important to look at each verse in its context. Not just in its context within the passage of Scripture, but its context historically speaking, and what these words meant to the people who were listening to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, as they sit there, and they listen to these astounding words coming from the Lord Jesus - what do you think was their reaction as they heard their Messiah, their Christ whom they thought was their political, religious, economic deliverer - and from His lips come these words: 'Blessed are they that are persecuted'? I dare to think that those, many of them that were listening to Him - and certainly the Scribes and the Pharisees - thought that it was the greatest religious nonsense that they had ever heard!

Why do I think that? If you turn with me for a moment to Acts chapter 28, Acts chapter 28, you'll find there an account of Paul, who is on one of his missionary journeys - but it gives us an insight to the thinking, the way people think in our world. It was the way many of the Jews thought, it's the way many religious and even charismatic figures today in our world think - this is the way they reason. Acts 28 verse 3 and 4: 'And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live'. These barbarians - they were Gentiles they weren't Jews, they're like us - and they look, and they see this man Paul. He's building a fire, and all of a sudden a deadly snake comes out of the fire, grabs hold of his hand - and they make the formula in their minds that this man is suffering because he's done something wrong - he must have sinned.

If you were to turn to John chapter 9 - you don't need to do it this morning, but you know the story - John chapter 9, you see that the disciples asked about a man that was born blind. They looked at the Lord Jesus and reasoned with Him: 'Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest'. Is it not the thinking of the world today, and it's increasingly so in the new age in which we live, that there is something called 'karma'? That when you do good, good will be done to you, and it'll all be weighed up one day, and when you come into another life you'll be a better person, a better being. You mightn't believe in that, but you might have in your mind - even as a Christian - this false idea that if you do good, good will be done to you; and if you do evil, well, evil will be done to you also. Believe it or not, Jesus' listeners had an idea of some type of prosperity gospel.

Do you remember what they were waiting on? They were sitting in the claws, and the clutches, and the jaws of a vicious Roman Empire. They were looking to the skies for their deliverer, their Messiah, to come and deliver them, to set them free, to defeat the enemy, to defeat the Emperor - Caesar. When the Lord Jesus Christ came they hailed Him as the King of the Jews, and they were waiting for Him to come in and build His eternal kingdom. Oh, we've learnt week after week that they were second guessed - they got the whole thing wrong because the Lord told them: 'My kingdom is in your hearts, children. I am come into this place as a peacemaker' - not to make peace in homes, because He did say that He would make war in homes, and there would be many relationships that would be broken down because of the Gospel. But what He was saying was, He was coming in to tear up a world's sin in order to bring peace to a dying race. He also said: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted'. Now, try and put yourself in their position. They're waiting for a military, economic, political, religious leader - and He comes out with these astounding words: 'Blessed are you when men take advantage of you, when men insult you, when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you - you're blessed, you're accepted with God, the smile God is upon your life'.

Now, I want you to note before we go any further, that the Lord said: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake' - that's very important. Because you could be here and think that, as a Christian, you're being persecuted because you're standing for the faith, and it may be that you're being persecuted because of your ignorant personality! That could be what's happening! You could think that you're being persecuted for the cause of God, but you're piously ignorant, you're rude, you're obnoxious! The Lord is saying here that it is the cause of righteousness, and more importantly the character of righteousness, that will be persecuted - that's why it comes as the eighth Beatitude.

What's He saying? Those that are poor in spirit will be persecuted. Those that mourn will be persecuted. Those that are meek, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, those that are merciful, those that are pure, peacemakers - you'll be persecuted, why? We looked week after week, didn't we, that this world, and His world then did not testify that you were to be poor in spirit. You were to be great in spirit! Self-esteem was the pinnacle! 'You're not to mourn over your sins, you're to forget about them and get on with your life. You're not to be meek, meek people are walked all over, don't be meek! You're not to be pure, you're not to be single-minded - a 'jack of all trades', that's what you're to be - don't worry about purity of mind in a filthy world, enjoy yourself! Don't hunger after righteousness, hunger and lust after money, sexual immorality, whatever tickles your fancy - if it feels good, hunger after that!'. And again the Lord Jesus Christ, He comes in - as He did right throughout this sermon - and He just turns the whole world upside-down.

Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake - do you want to know the secret of what this 'righteousness' sake' really means? If you look at verse 10, you see it's talked about as righteousness' sake, and then in verse 11 He says: 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake' - there's the secret. You see if you're poor in spirit, you see if you're mournful over your sin, you see if you're meek, you see if you hunger and thirst after the good things

of God, and you're merciful, and you're pure, and you're a peacemaker - you will be persecuted! Because what the Lord is saying here is: 'You'll be persecuted for My sake, because if you live like that, you will be living My life out in your life - and men never ever liked Me!'. Isn't that right? We read within the word of God that Christlikeness will always be persecuted.

If you turn to John chapter 15, John chapter 15 and verse 18 to 20, the Lord said this - He warned His disciples: 'If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you'. Are you greater than your Master? Oh, my friends today, if we can only see this: that it's not the way we preach, but it's our Christlikeness that people will hate. And, oh, they have always hated it - throughout all of history - to be like God. Paul told Timothy: 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution'. He told the Christians in Antioch in Acts 14:22: 'We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God'.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer suffered at the hands of the Nazis in World War II, and he said these sobering words to us today, in the same century in which he suffered, he said: 'Suffering then, is the badge of true discipleship'. Now, I'm going to keep you a little bit longer today - not too long, but I want to finish this series and I want to deal with it. I want to talk to you first of all about our fathers, your fathers, who have suffered. Those that were persecuted in times past, indeed the historian today Tennis-Scott Latourette (sp?) says this: 'No other faith of mankind, religious or political, has quite so extensive a record of violent bitter opposition to its growth than the Christian church'. Think about it for a minute, go right back to the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 4. What's happening? The child of God, Abel, is being persecuted by the child of Satan, Cain. The Lord said to the Pharisees themselves, He faced them face-to-face, He looked into their eyeballs in Matthew 23:35 and said that, from the blood of Abel to Zacharias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar - you slew him!'. And incidentally, Abel begins with what letter? 'A', Zechariah begins with 'Z' - and I like to think that the A to Z of all the martyrs in the world testify that: 'Blessed are they that are persecuted', for they have the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Do you remember Stephen? When he preached his message, his sermon, before he was martyred in Acts 7:52 - what did he accuse the Pharisees of? He said: 'Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?'. You can go back to Moses, and those that grumbled, and those that wanted his blood, those that resented him for bringing them out of Egypt. You can go to David and read the Psalms about those that attacked him, his enemies in the flesh and even the spirit. You can look at Elijah, as he runs and he sits under that tree, from the woman Jezebel. Have you ever read about Jeremiah? How he was beaten, put in stocks? How he was thrown into a cistern of mud, and threatened with execution, and eventually martyred? What about Isaiah? The second century Christian father Justin Martyn (sp?) tells us that Isaiah was sawn asunder with a wooden sword!

Indeed, the word of God testifies in Hebrews 11 and 36: 'And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy)'. You go into the New Testament, and the very first sermon that was preached on the day of Pentecost, even before Peter opened his mouth he was being accused, and his friends, of being drunk! Then straight after that sermon two of the disciples were taken and thrown into prison. They were told not to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus. Indeed, if you look throughout the whole 28 chapters of the book of Acts, you find at least 56 references to persecution. The tradition is that Andrew, the Lord's disciple, was tied to a cross and left to die, the history books tell us that Peter was crucified upside-down - why? Because blessed are they that are persecuted, because these men and

these women, these boys and girls, like Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:13, counted themselves as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things - they counted their life dung, rubbish, that they would win Christ!

Sure, the early church was accused of drunkenness, cannibalism, because they ate flesh - people thought - and drank blood. They were murdered because [people] said they had sexual orgies because they called the breaking of bread 'a love feast'. Nero fed thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ to the lions and burnt them at the stake - and today you have communism in our world. You might be facing it at work, my friend. You might be facing it at school, or University, or in your very family - but the reality is this: those that live godly will suffer! They will suffer. Blanchard says this in his commentary on the Beatitudes: 'Today the pure gospel of the grace of God remains anathema, not only to the blatantly godless, but to countless sects, cults, to Roman Catholicism, to liberalism which robs the Bible of its authority, Christ of His deity, His miracles of their integrity, and His substitutionary death of its efficacy'. Thomas Scott said, 200 years to our century today: 'The wicked hate the holy image of God and those that bear it'.

But look with me also, your fathers suffered, they always did - but you will suffer if, if, you live godly in Christ Jesus. If you're a Christian the first seven beatitudes outline what you will have in your life if you are a Christian - and you can certainly say, at the conclusion of Beatitude eight, that if you're not persecuted at some time in your life you couldn't be a Christian! I'm not saying that you have to be persecuted every moment of the day, that's not what I'm saying. But if you have never faced opposition, if you've never faced segregation, rejection, insults because of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ - the question must be asked: is His character within you?

Do you know what I believe the tragedy is today? Perhaps within the world, but within the church of Jesus Christ at large, it's this: persecution is absent from many of our lives. Why is that? First of all, I believe it's absent because we as Christians are cut off from the world. The Lord said in this passage that you're to be a light in the world, in the dark place - if you're going to spread light you have to be in a dark place - but what do we do? We come to our church - and that's only right, that's what we do do - but our friends, who are they? Who do we contact day by day, is it unsaved people to bring an opportunity to them of trusting Christ? Sure, we even play golf with Christians! Some of us send our children to Christian schools, totally segregated from the world at large where they can reach the darkness! Many of us are sheltered from persecution.

Secondly: I believe that there is silent Christianity today. People who don't tell others in their workplace, or at their school, or wherever, that they're one of the Lord's - and the question must be asked: is silent Christianity, Christianity at all? Thirdly - and I think this is the biggest reason: the church is becoming like the world. I'm not talking about in its dress now - it is in the places that it goes, but that's not specifically what I'm talking about, I'm talking about attitudes. I want to quote Mr Kent Hughes, who wrote in his commentary - listen to this: 'If you want to get along the formula is simple' - that means in the world - 'Approve the world's morals and ethics at least outwardly. Live like the world lives, laugh at its humour, immerse yourself in its entertainment, smile when God is mocked, act as if all religions converge on the same road, don't mention hell, draw no moral judgements, take no stand on moral issues - and above all: don't preach the Gospel to others!'. The fact is this: the church must be persecuted, or the church is not the church at all.

A hundred years after this sermon on the mount was preached, a man came to the great church father Tertullian with a problem. Because, since professing faith in Christ, his business interests and Christianity were conflicting - and he ended up by asking that great church father: 'What can I do? I must live!'. Tertullian turned to him and said: 'Must you?'. Tertullian esteemed death for Christ greater than life for self. That is the message that we have been looking at in the Beatitudes week after week: that to live is Christ and

to die is gain! That we would count everything in this world, all externalities, as rubbish so that we might win Christ and be found in Him!

Your fathers suffered, and you will suffer if you live righteously - but this is the great message, this is the great joyous ending of all the beatitudes: you will be blessed if you suffer for Christ! You will be blessed with joy - isn't that what He says? Look at the passage again, Matthew chapter 5, look what He says in verse 11: 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven'. You're to rejoice not in the pain, not in the sorrow, but you're to rejoice in the fact that you've been called worthy to suffer with Christ, and that one day - if you have a forward and an upward look - you will be given a reward with Christ.

You know, the Greek word for 'joy' here - do you know what it literally means? We're very reserved people here in Northern Ireland - it means to leap, to skip with excessive delight and ecstasy! J. B. Phillips translates it like this: 'A joy that words cannot express and which has in it a hint of the glories of heaven'. In Acts chapter 5 and verse 41, when Peter and his other friends had been flogged before the Sanhedrin shortly after the day of Pentecost, do you know what it says? Listen to this: '[the apostles left], rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name'. You know, that's a supernatural joy, that's something that I can't explain unless you've experienced it. It's something that the great Scottish Christian, Samuel Rutherford, penned when he described how he was locked up in a prison cell. He wrote from his prison cell and said these words: 'I never knew, in my nine years of preaching, so much of Christ's love as He taught me in Aberdeen by six months imprisonment. Christ's cross is such a burden as sails are to a ship, and wings are to a bird'.

I heard recently the story in our living memory of a Romanian Pastor, he knew what it was to rejoice and have joy in his persecution. He was tortured, he was imprisoned, mercilessly they put him through excruciating pain - and yet, in his cell where he was in all that degradation and inhumanity, he testified that he experienced such joy! He was locked in solitary confinement, and day by day he was summoned by his captors who cut chunks of flesh from his body. Then, when he would return to his cell where he was starved almost to death, he would lie there and he would pray to his God - and he testified that in the midst of that sadism there were times when the joy of Christ would so overcome him that he would pull himself up and shuffle about the cell in a holy dance! So remarkable was his joy that on his return from prison, when he got home to his wife and his children, do you know what the first thing he did was? He had a day of fasting as a memorial to the joy that he had been given through persecution!

I have finished all I have to say really today, and in the study of the Beatitudes over the past weeks - but let me ask you this: are you being persecuted for Christ? Not for your character, but for Christ's character in you? For if you are, and if you are fulfilling all of these Beatitudes, the Lord Jesus says to you today: 'Great is your reward in heaven!'.

J.D. Rockefeller died, and every paper in United States of America was speculating how much he was worth. For one reporter it got too much for him, and he ran and he organised a meeting with one of Rockefeller's aids, and he came to him and when he got into the room with this man, and he thought he was going to find out - he said to him: 'How much did Rockefeller leave?'. The man looked at him and soberly and calmly said: 'He left it all'.

The message of the sermon on the mount is this: what are you living for? Are you living for down here, or are you living for up there? May it be said of us, as an Assembly and individually, that we like Paul may know Him, and the power of His resurrection - and if we can take it, brethren, the fellowship of His suffering.

Our Father, we are conscious as we look into history that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. And we hear the writer to the Hebrews, who says to us today in our nation, ye have not yet striven against sin by shedding your blood. Lord, we don't know where to look at times, because when we look into ourselves and we see how we fall short, Lord we despair. But Lord, let us not remain with our gaze there - but let us, as Paul has exhorted us in the book of Romans, to look to the Lord Jesus and to say: 'Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'. Lord, help us to hear the trumpet sound, help us in these last days to put on the gospel armour, and to fight the good fight of faith. Bless us now, we pray, and part us with Your fear, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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