

Sermon for 29 January 2023

It is the middle of summer. The mountain looks brown and rugged. Jesus saw the crowds had gathered at the bottom. He went up on the mountainside. Imagine that this is Mount Ruapehu. Jesus sat down. His disciples, that is us as modern-day disciples gathered around him. Jesus began to teach. We come with all kinds of experiences and emotions, with our life experiences, our joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies. But we come as disciples and as students of Jesus. Does Jesus have our real and wholehearted attention that day and forever?

When does God get our attention? Usually when there is tragedy, loss, uncertainty, fear, anxiety... this is when we reach out to God that is when He gets our real attention.

The Beatitudes, translates as “Full of Blessing” or “Full of God, fully and wholly satisfied in God, connected to God and having God live in us.” Simply put, Jesus is saying this is how to have life with and in God, the life intended for us to live as believers. The Beatitudes show us how to live connected to God.

What then comes out of Jesus’ mouth could be said to be startling, countercultural and different to what any other teacher or philosopher was saying. What Jesus says paints a picture for what a true disciple should look like. Jesus directs us to the opposite of what the world expects. Jesus gets our attention.

In the Beatitudes Jesus reveals how his kingdom works. What he establishes is revolutionary and different than anything the world has seen. Jesus really expects his followers to live like this. The Beatitudes are not just something that are good in theory, they are the markers, the ‘rules’ for our life as disciples. What do these markers look like for us as modern-day disciples?

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” **Matthew 5:3**

The phrase Jesus uses “poor in spirit” refers to our spiritual condition. Those that are poor in spirit realize that nothing they can do by themselves. Recognising that we are powerless, helpless, and undeserving. This doesn’t sound very blessed. But we are

blessed because Jesus has not forgotten us. We are promised the kingdom of heaven.

This is the opposite to the way the modern world operates. It's the strongest, independent and most articulate people that are said to get the life Jesus promises. But not so in God's kingdom. It's those that become poor, those that recognize their own need for the saviour, those that cry out for their saviour that will receive the kingdom.

If we want the best life each of us must first make ourselves poor in spirit. We put pride and independence aside. We must recognize our situation and that the only way forward is to rely on God. We are dependent on God. Blessed are those who recognise their desperate need for God. God will bring them into the kingdom.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. **Matthew 5:4**

Jesus adds blessed are those who mourn for their sin, for they will be comforted. Jesus is saying that in the brokenness of our sin God is with us. It is in that brokenness that we will find hope, healing, and experience the life Jesus promises, life to the fullest in him. In the modern world brokenness is seen as weakness, of not accomplishing in life. Blessed are those who mourn their sin, for God will forgive them and restore them to the life he intended them to have. We are to be responsive to personal sin and tender-hearted toward one another.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. **Matthew 5:5**

In Jesus' statements to this point he was describing personal recognition of our circumstances and our response to those. Now Jesus switches gears and he starts talking about our outward posture and expression.

We might say that meekness is strength under control. This what Jesus is calling us to today. He is calling us to have our strength under control. He's calling us to use our strength (be that power, influence) for the benefit of others. An example might be advocating for others who have little voice themselves. In the modern world strength

is used in ways that increase the vulnerability of others, as diminishing, demeaning, dis-empowering them.

He's calling us to not throw our weight around to get what we deserve. Paul reminds the people of Corinth that God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

Blessed are those who have their strength under control, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. **Matthew 5:6**

Psalm 42, verses 1-2: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

This is a picture of an animal desperately crawling through the desert looking for water so that they could survive. Jesus is referring to the same kind of hunger and thirst. It's a desperate, if I don't get this I will die, kind of craving for God.

Jesus is saying blessed are those that are so desperate to do the will of God that it's the only thing of importance in their life. They will be filled, their thirst will be quenched, and their hunger satisfied.

Blessed are those who are desperate to hear and do the will of God, for they will long for nothing. In the modern world satisfaction is sought from material and financial gain, bigger is not always better.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. **Matthew 5:7**

We often have a double standard when it comes to mercy. On the one hand, we like to be shown mercy. On the other hand, we like to see others get what they deserve.

Many people hold on tightly to wrongs that have been done against them. And they are justified in doing so, they were wronged. However, by holding onto those wrongs they are letting go of God's mercy. We cannot hold onto both.

Grace seems unfair until we need some. Jesus is teaching us that the life he offers comes to those that offer what is undeserved, mercy. The life offered will not come to those that hang onto past grievances. It will not come to those who are stingy with their grace. The life offered belongs to those that give the undeserved gift of grace because they were given an undeserved gift of grace. There are many different needs in the modern world, people struggle with daily life and with hope. We can make a difference one merciful act at a time.

Blessed are those who show mercy and forgive, for they understand the mercy that's been shown to them. The outworking of faith to meet the needs of others.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. **Matthew 5:8**

The religious leaders in Jesus' day had a strong focus on ceremonial cleanliness. They had a habit of fixing their external appearance while ignoring what was on the inside. Jesus continually called them out on their actions because he saw through their pretence.

We too often focus on our outward appearances but ignore our hearts. We think we can simply look the part. But Jesus comes along and says something different. He says it's the pure in heart that are blessed. In other words, we shouldn't focus on fixing our actions. Instead, focus our heart on Jesus.

That's not to say our actions don't matter, they do. We've just reversed the order. When we focus on our actions, our heart will not change. When we focus on our heart, our actions will follow. Simply put, Jesus is saying the blessed are those who do the right things for the right reasons. The emphasis is on the motive behind the actions, not the actions themselves. In the modern world actions are not always heart felt, they simply make a person look good without the heartfelt right intentions.

Blessed are those focus on the motive of their actions, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. **Matthew 5:9**

When Jesus uses the word peace, he is saying, one who has received the peace of God AND brings peace to others. Not simply one who makes peace, but one who spreads the peace of God that he/she has experienced. When Jesus says the peacemakers, will be called sons and daughters of God. This is not just a statement of relationships, but of character.

So when Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers, he's saying God is a peacemaker. God pursued peace with us when we had absolutely no interest in peace with him. Jesus is also saying something about us. He's saying that when we pursue peace we are being like God.

Blessed are those who have received peace and bring peace to others, for they are the sons and daughters of God. Forbearance instead of retaliation; forgiveness of wrongs; restoration of fellowship. In the modern world peace is needed in individuals, families, communities and nations, in fact worldwide. As disciples we have an important role in sharing God's peace.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **Matthew 5:10-11**

This could be the beatitude that we find most challenging as disciples in the modern world.

We are aware of what persecuted means. What we need to focus on is the why. Jesus says blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. There are some Christians who get persecuted for saying and doing some hurtful things, things that Jesus never stood for. But when we are persecuted for the things Jesus was persecuted for then we are blessed.

Blessed are you when you are persecuted when what you say and do are consistent with what Jesus says and does. Steadfast loyalty to Christ that cannot be broken. This is important in the modern world where Christ is recognised and known about less and less. Self-sufficiency and independence are sought in our secular world.

But this is not the end of it...

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **Matthew 5:12**

That word rejoice has been translated in different ways in English. But in the Greek, it was one word and is used in many different ways. It could be translated as a greeting or to address someone. The phrase "be glad" means rejoicing in hope, excessive joy. It means to be joyful beyond what our circumstance should allow.

The question becomes, how can Jesus say be glad in the context of being lied about, criticized, falsely accused, and persecuted? How can he say rejoice, be glad, be joyful?

We need to understand the weight of his words. He's not saying this in a trivial sense. He's not telling us to fake it til we make it, to grin and bear it. What he's saying that there is something in us that endures beyond our current circumstances. There is something in us that despite how dark and bad our life might be we still have reason to rejoice. We might think: this is a big ask when we are in a dark place.

That's the gospel message. That no matter how bad life gets we can still rejoice. Not in our circumstance, but in who Jesus is. And let us not forget we serve a God who not just tells us to do this, but who modelled it for us on the cross.

Blessed are you who can rejoice in worst moments in life, for you have found the true treasure. No matter the tragedy, the trauma, the fear and the anxiety, the despair and the uncertainty. We are not defined by our circumstances or situation. In

the midst of the most challenging situation people do amazing things and the unexpected happens. Hope is present. God with us. We share the peace and hope of God as disciples in this modern world. We have God's attention and He has OUR attention whether we are in a situation of gratitude or grief.

AMEN