

## **The Beatitudes**

### **The character of God's people**



**MU Sydney Bible Studies 2017**



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## Suggestions for using these studies

1. Enjoy the studies. There is no test at the end. They are provided to help you grow in your relationship with our great God.
2. Make sure that each person has a copy of the study booklet you are using. Some people have hearing problems and no-one concentrates all the time, so they need a written copy of the questions to take part in the discussions. Copies of the studies can be bought from the MU Office for each person, or you may wish to buy one copy and use your church facilities to photocopy the number you need.
3. If possible it is good to hand out the studies a week or so before the day, so people have time to prepare in advance. Encourage your people to read the Bible passage a couple of times as they prepare. If you do this it is wise to have some extra copies available on the day in case some people forget to bring theirs, or extra people join you.
4. It is essential that the leader has fully prepared the study beforehand. You will find that the background notes are relevant to the answers of the questions.
5. The 'Think About' section is there to help you focus on the big issue of the study. They are hypothetical questions and there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer. Don't stress over this section, enjoy it.
6. **You may need to choose a selection of questions to discuss if your group has limited time available for discussion. Choose the questions that best meet the needs of your group. Choose your selection beforehand, don't simply end when you run out of time. Let your group know (before the meeting if possible) the questions you have chosen to work with.**
7. Where you find multiple questions within the one question read all the questions first and then deal with each individual question separately. This is so you understand the bigger picture before you deal with the simpler breakdown.
8. You can increase participation by asking several people to read the Bible passages aloud for the group. This also provides a variety of voices and helps to keep people engaged with the study. Make sure you ask your potential readers ahead of time to make sure they are comfortable doing this.
9. It is generally better for discussion to sit in a semi-circle rather than to sit in rows. It is hard to talk to the back of someone's head, and it is generally easier to hear when sitting in semi-circles.
10. If you have a large group (twenty or more), consider breaking into smaller groups of about six to ten for the discussion time. The person leading the study could do an introduction, small groups could then discuss the questions with an assigned leader for each group (who has prepared beforehand), and then all could rejoin for a conclusion time directed by the leader.
11. Another alternative for a large group, is choosing several questions that don't just need factual answers but require discussion, and asking the members of the group to discuss those questions with the person next to them. Then, if appropriate, ask if anyone would like to share their thoughts with the rest of the group.
12. All Bible readings are taken from New International Version, as found on the Bible Gateway website <https://www.biblegateway.com>

# The Beatitudes

## Matthew 5:1-16

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them. He said:*

*3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,*

*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*4 Blessed are those who mourn,*

*for they will be comforted.*

*5 Blessed are the meek,*

*for they will inherit the earth.*

*6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*

*for they will be filled.*

*7 Blessed are the merciful,*

*for they will be shown mercy.*

*8 Blessed are the pure in heart,*

*for they will see God.*

*9 Blessed are the peacemakers,*

*for they will be called children of God.*

*10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,*

*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

*13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

*14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.*

*15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

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## Background to the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are probably some of the best known verses of the whole Bible. Yet their meaning is often confused as being a way to salvation. This is not so.

### The Setting

The Beatitudes come near the beginning of Jesus' ministry after he has been baptised by John, tempted by Satan, selected four of his disciples and begun to preach "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*" (Matt 4:17)

The Beatitudes form part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus carefully describes the characteristics and life of a Christian.

The Sermon on the Mount comes at a time when Israel is at a very low period in its history. The people are oppressed politically and economically by Roman rule and they long for the promise of the Messiah to be fulfilled. The Jewish leaders longed for a return of the might of Israel, as a leading nation in the world both politically and economically. They long for the return of the power of the Israel of old.

What they don't long for is a Messiah who appears to be weak, who cares about the poor, the frightened and the oppressed. Jewish leaders of the time who benefited from being under Roman rule didn't want change. They certainly didn't want a King who would depose them of their authority and power and take away their wealth.

This was the world in which Jesus came to preach the Good News of the Gospel, to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, to fulfil the law and the prophets, and to fulfil the hope of the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17 "Do not think I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." The promises of God to Israel found throughout the Old Testament as declared by the prophets are here being fulfilled by Jesus, God's only son. It is Jesus himself who is bringing in the new Kingdom of God.

Jesus had just completed a mission throughout Galilee, where he taught in the Synagogues and preached the Good News of the Kingdom, healed the sick, the demon possessed and the paralyzed. Many crowds gathered around him. The people came from all around, from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan.



### The Decapolis:

1. Gerasa in Jordan
2. Scythopolis in Israel, the only city west of the Jordan River
3. Hippias in Syria
4. Gadara in Jordan
5. Pella in Jordan
6. Philadelphia, modern day Amman, the capital of Jordan
7. Capitolias, today Beit Ras in west Jordan
8. Canatha in Syria
9. Raphana in Jordan
10. Damascus, the capital of modern Syria; Damascus was more north than the others and so is sometimes thought to have been a "honorary" member.

(Reference: Wikipedia)

It was when Jesus saw this crowd from all over the place that he *"went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them."* (Matthew 5:1-2)

Jesus sat down to teach as he did when teaching in the temple. This was the posture of the Rabbis as they taught, which means that what he had to say was important and those listening needed to pay attention.

The disciples, who gathered to hear Jesus speak, at this time, would have been the four he had specifically chosen, Simon called Peter, his brother Andrew, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. These four, with the other eight, were later to be called Apostles. The remainder of the crowd were also disciples of Jesus as they were people who had followed him from place to place hearing him speak and watching him perform miracles of healing.

It is said that the mountains around the Sea of Galilee helped to form excellent places for accommodating large crowds and the acoustics were similar to those of a well constructed amphitheatre. It is interesting that Jesus went up a mountain to speak to his followers. This situation has often been compared with the event at Mount Sinai where Moses received the law. On this mountain Jesus states in Matthew 5:17: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."*

Jesus sat down to teach, and delivered what is probably the most well known of all his lessons. The Beatitudes form the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapters 5-7.

### **The Sermon on the Mount**

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' teaching about the inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven and how to live as children of the Kingdom. The Sermon provides strong teaching of how one might enter the Kingdom of Heaven: Matthew 7:7-8 *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."*

### **The Beatitudes**

The Beatitudes provide a clear picture of the characteristics of God's people, Jesus' disciples. They also teach us that our reward is not just what we hope for but is in part available to us right now. The Beatitudes clearly present to us that sense of tension whereby the Kingdom has come but has not yet come in full. The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated by Jesus but has not yet been consummated. The consummation of the Kingdom will happen when Jesus comes again to gather all his people to himself. He will take us to the new heaven and new earth that has been promised to those who love, serve and have put their trust in him. The Beatitudes describe the characteristics of those who already profess their faith in Jesus.

Unlike the gifts of the Spirit as listed by Paul whereby particular gifts are given to particular people to use in service for Jesus, the Beatitudes describe the characteristics of all God's people. That is, God's people display all eight of these characteristics not just one or a few of them but all of them.

All eight of the Beatitudes build from one to the next. Those who are poor in spirit, who recognise their poverty in terms of their spiritual bankruptcy, those who recognise that they are utterly dependent on the goodwill or grace of God for survival. The poor in spirit recognise that it doesn't matter what they do, say, own or give away will ever satisfy the requirements of salvation. This only comes from God.

The first four of these characteristics, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are qualities that concern the individual and their relationship with God. The last four that are relational qualities and pertain to characteristics of the individual's relationship with both God and others i.e. the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Those who mourn do so because they are deeply sorry for their spiritual poverty caused by their sin. They mourn the sorry state they are in because they are sinful people who do not deserve God's grace and mercy.



The meek are meek as they understand what it means to be spiritually poor and to be sorrowful because of their spiritual poverty. They exhibit meekness because they know where they stand in relation to God and the Kingdom of Heaven. They are not proud and boastful but are grateful to Jesus for what he has done for them in bringing them into his Kingdom. The meek are kind and gentle and obey instruction from God their heavenly Father, just as Jesus obeyed him by going to the cross.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness can only do so because they have experienced being poor in spirit. They have mourned over their poverty and responded with meekness knowing where they truly stand in the scheme of God's mercy and kindness. Because of all these things they hunger and thirst for righteousness. They long to be the kind of people God would have them be knowing that this too is only possible because of what God has done for them. They can only be righteous because Jesus lives in them and guides and nurtures them to live lives that are worthy of the God in whom they believe.

The final four Beatitudes are relational in nature and concern the individual's relationship with God and others. The person who is filled with righteousness finds that this righteousness overflows to others in that they act with mercy towards those who need compassion and kindness. Those who are pure in heart are not deceitful, devoid nor do they have mixed motives. What you see on the outside of the pure in heart is also the reality of their inner beings. The peacemakers work toward reconciling those who are at odds with one another, or who are at odds with God himself. The peacemaker will work at bringing people into a relationship with God as their Saviour. Those who are persecuted are the ones who, in attempting to reconcile God and man, are persecuted for righteousness sake. They are persecuted because of what they say and do in Jesus' name.

Jesus says that those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and the persecuted for righteousness sake, they are all blessed.

Being blessed does not mean that they will be happy. It means that despite their circumstances they will experience the deep joy that only God can give his people. The deep joy of belonging, of being secure, of being significant in God's scheme of things, of being instrumental in fulfilling his plans for his people. This is blessedness.

So, the poor in spirit will receive the Kingdom of Heaven, those who mourn will be comforted, the meek will inherit the earth and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.

The merciful will be shown mercy, the pure in heart will see God, the peacemakers will be called sons of God and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake will receive the Kingdom of Heaven.

All of these blessings are to be received and experienced to some extent in the here and now. But all of these blessings won't be fully realised until the Kingdom of God is brought to completion.

Those who know Jesus will experience a taste of what is to come. That taste offers us the hope we need to continue in faithfulness so that we might receive the full reward that is waiting for us in heaven.

As John Stott states, the Beatitudes present a counter-culture to the world as we know it. Stott states, "*The ways of the God of Scripture appear topsy-turvy to men. For God exalts the humble and abases the proud, calls the first last and the last first, ascribes greatness to the servant, sends the rich away empty handed and declares the meek to be his heirs. The culture of the world and the counter-culture of Christ are at loggerheads with each other. Jesus congratulates those whom the world pities most and calls the world's rejects 'blessed'.*" (Page 56, Stott, The Message of the Sermon on the Mount)

### **The Challenge**

The challenge of the Beatitudes is, for those of us who have been called into the Kingdom of God, to live as though we are part of this Christian 'counter-culture'. While we live in this world we are called to live as though we are not of this world. We are called to be servants of God, looking after and caring for one another, not putting ourselves first but trying to meet the needs of others.

At the same time Christians are called to be peacemakers, reconciling God's people to himself by sharing what Jesus has done for us, making people aware of their sinful natures in order for them to understand where they stand before the God of creation so that they too can choose to submit to him, the one who died in order to save them.

In doing these things we can expect to be persecuted or humiliated or suffer in the name of Jesus as a mark of those who love him.

We are called to be salt and light. We are called to share what we know about Jesus and to display that knowledge in such a way that all people will hear it, see it, understand it and respond to it. In doing these things we can be assured that on earth we will receive a taste of the blessings that will be fully released in heaven.

# The Beatitudes

## Matthew 5:1-16

<sup>1</sup>. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup>. and he began to teach them. He said: <sup>3</sup>. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." <sup>5</sup>. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup>. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup>. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup>. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. <sup>13</sup>. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. <sup>14</sup>. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

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## Background to Bible Study 1: Matthew 5:1-4

Jesus went up onto the side of a mountain to teach his disciples. Those disciples included Simon, called Peter and his brother Andrew and James the son of Zebedee and his brother John who were later to be called Apostles along with the other eight. The remainder of the crowd were also Jesus' disciples as they had committed to following him all around Galilee listening to him teach about the Kingdom of God while healing the sick, the paralysed and casting out demons.

On climbing the mountain he assumed the posture of a teacher in the temple. He sat down as the Rabbis did while teaching. By assuming this posture he was saying that what I want to teach you now is important so I really want you to listen carefully.

Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount beginning with the Beatitudes. He said: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*"

To be blessed does not mean that you are happy. Being happy is a very subjective feeling and is totally related to the circumstance in which you find yourself. To be blessed is to be given a gift from God himself. God blesses us by offering us a gift that is perfect, that leaves you filled with a deep sense of joy, a deep sense of belonging, of knowing that you matter to him, that he has entrusted into your care something of value and your reward is his blessing.

Being blessed is not dependant upon your circumstances but on your relationship with God, your heavenly Father. It depends on your obedience to his will as his servant, and as one who trusts and believes in what Jesus has done for you through his death and resurrection.

Each of the Beatitudes, starting with those who are poor in spirit, evolves from the one before it. So one cannot mourn until one has recognised that they are poor in spirit.

To be poor in spirit does not mean you are without wealth or that you are materially poor. It means you recognise that without God you have nothing of value, are totally dependent on him. You are spiritually poor.

The poor in spirit are those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty, in fact their spiritual bankruptcy, before God. The poor in spirit are those who acknowledge their status as hopeless sinners, who deserve God's judgement and wrath. The poor in spirit are those who recognise that they can bring nothing of worth to God to change their status as sinners before him. The poor in spirit are those who know that only God can rescue them from their plight and bring them into a right relationship with him.

Their blessing is most remarkable because in their poverty they trust in Jesus and the God of creation. His blessing to them is the gift of belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven. Their status changes from spiritual emptiness to having a place in the Kingdom of God. They become his people in his heaven and enjoy the benefits of living in his Kingdom. This gift is given to them by God and is free and undeserved. It is through his mercy and grace that he offers them life in the Kingdom.

Those who mourn are blessed through comfort. This comfort comes from the forgiveness we receive as we present ourselves before God with a repentant and contrite heart. The Old Testament prophets declared that the one who would comfort was to be the Messiah as he forgave the sins of the repentant "*the comforter would bind the brokenhearted.*" (Isaiah 61:1) We continue to mourn as we are deeply sorry for the way in which we choose at times to ignore God and attempt to run our lives as we want, that is, in disobedience to his will. We continue to mourn as we recognise the plight of those who do not know Jesus and as we witness the sinfulness of the world in which we live. We will not see the end of sin until Jesus returns to bring all his people to himself to the new heaven and new earth we have been promised.

## **Bible Study 1**

### **Think about:**

Have you ever sat under the teaching of a great and gifted teacher? Who was it? What did you learn? How did you feel at the time? Did you want to share what you learned with everyone you knew afterwards? Was it hard to stop talking about it? Are you still excited about what you learned at that time?

### **Read Matthew 5:1-4**

1. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them. He said:
- <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

### **Bible Study Questions:**

1. What is your personal response to Matthew 5:1-4?
2. What does it mean to be poor in spirit?
3. Would you describe yourself as rich or poor in spirit?
4. When was the last time you felt a genuine poverty of spirit? That is, do you consistently recognise your inability to deal with the your sinful nature and your critical need for God in your life?

5. As one who recognises your spiritual poverty how do you understand what it means to be blessed through the receipt of the Kingdom of Heaven? What do you understand the Kingdom of Heaven to be like? The following verses may help:

**Romans 14:17**

*"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

**James 2:5**

*"Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"*

**Revelation 7:9-17**

*After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

*<sup>11</sup> All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God <sup>12</sup> saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honour and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

*<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" <sup>14</sup> And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. <sup>16</sup> They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; <sup>17</sup> for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

6. Part of the process of becoming a Christian is the recognition of sin in our lives. It is this sin that brings us to repentance causing a deep sorrow for the way in which we have treated God. Some of us have wept over our sins just as Jesus wept over the sins of the world. Paul says in Romans 7, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" What was the last thing you wept over? How do you express your sorrow for your sins? When did you last do that?
7. Those who mourn in Vs 4 seem to be suffering a very deep seated sorrow. What do you think they are mourning over?
8. These days we tend to not want to dwell on our sinfulness before Christ but focus more on the joy of belonging to him and the benefits of being in the Kingdom of God. Should we mourn over the sins of the world? Should we mourn over our own sin? If this is so what can we do with this great depth of sorrow?
9. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 *"Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. <sup>10</sup> Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."*

What is the outcome of your sorrow?

10. Jesus says that those who mourn will be comforted. Do you feel the blessing of comfort in the midst of your mourning? If so how? If not why do you think this is your experience?
11. Thomas Watson (The Beatitudes, 1975) said, "Sin must have tears and these tears must flow before a person can enter the Kingdom of God. Only those who have been humbled, wounded and broken under the crushing burden of their sin can ever know God's saving grace." Psalm 38:18 says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

What is your response to this passage and verse in the light of the first two Beatitudes?

12. **Romans 7:14-25**

*"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. <sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup> For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup> but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. <sup>24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

- a) How do these words from Paul relate to the two Beatitudes we are looking at here?
- b) How does this passage relate to those who are poor in spirit and those who mourn because of the sin in their lives and the sin we see in the world in which we live?



13. Vs 25, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Paul is so thankful for what Jesus has done for him. He fully understands the mercy and grace of God in response to his own sinfulness. We too can enjoy today the wonders of being God's children in his Kingdom. We can also enjoy today the comfort he offers us as his children.

How can we express our thankfulness to God for his grace and mercy in our lives?

### Concluding Thoughts

Calvin said, "He only who is reduced to nothing in himself and relies on the mercy of God, is poor in spirit." To people who understand this and have fully repented of their sin will the Kingdom of God be given. This is a free gift of grace. We can do nothing to earn it.

While those of us who love Jesus have to live in this world, we can still mourn our sin and the sins of the world BUT Jesus came that he might comfort those who believe in and trust in him. This is the promise we can hold fast. We can also remember and hold fast to the promise of Revelation 7:13-17:

*"Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"*

*<sup>14</sup> I answered, "Sir, you know."*

*And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore,*

*"they are before the throne of God  
and serve him day and night in his temple;  
and he who sits on the throne  
will shelter them with his presence.*

*<sup>16</sup> 'Never again will they hunger;  
never again will they thirst.*

*The sun will not beat down on them,'  
nor any scorching heat.*

*<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the centre of the throne  
will be their shepherd;*

*'he will lead them to springs of living water.'*

*'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"*

At the end of days we will enjoy the completeness of the promise that God WILL wipe away every tear from our eyes. What an amazing promise to look forward to.

# The Beatitudes

## Matthew 5:1-16

<sup>1</sup>. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them. He said: <sup>3</sup>. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." <sup>5</sup>. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup>. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup>. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup>. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. <sup>13</sup>. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. <sup>14</sup>. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

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## Background to Bible Study 2:

This Bible Study examines verses 5 and 6 of the Beatitudes, "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*"

Meekness conjures up all sorts of images. To many it implies weakness, being overly submissive, spineless, and timid. Meekness is none of these things. We are not naturally meek. The fact that meekness was included in the list of the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) indicates that meekness (gentleness) is a gift from God that is given only to those who have first recognised that without God they are hopeless, so they mourn their own sin and the sins of the world that separate them from the love of God.

Meekness is given to those who submit themselves to God's rule over their lives and so out of gratitude choose to be obedient to his instruction. The meek seek to always do God's will, to uncover what his will is and then make every effort, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to achieve his will.

The character of meekness is an indicator that a person is already a member of the Kingdom of God. The behaviour of meekness is not a stepping stone for entry into God's Kingdom but evidence that a person is already a fully fledged member. Meekness is one of the marks of a Christian.

How do we recognise meekness in God's people? They are the balanced ones who, recognising their feelings, do not explode in anger or totally deny anger at all times. They are not wimps. They find a middle road recognising wrong done to themselves or others and dealing with it with grace and forgiveness. They are the those who appear in control of their feelings and so their reactions to hurt, circumstances, pain and struggle indicate an acceptance of God's will in their lives and a willingness to pursue a Christlike behaviour pattern rather than revenge. They are the those who are not proud but are humble and recognise their status before God, understanding their role in his plans and purposes and choosing to live a holy and blameless life.

An example of such existence is found in Spurgeon's book, 'The Beatitudes' (page 37ff). It is the story of the Shepherd and the Doctor and it goes like this:

*Doctor: "What kind of weather will we have tomorrow?"*

*Shepherd: "Well, we will have the sort of weather that pleases me."*

*Doctor: "What do you mean?"*

*Shepherd: "The weather that pleases God always pleases me."*

*Doctor: "Shepherd, your lot seems somewhat hard."*

*Shepherd: "Oh no sir! I don't think so, for it abounds with mercies."*

*Doctor: "But you have to work very hard."*

*Shepherd: "Yes, there is a great deal of labour, but that is better than being lazy."*

*Doctor: "But don't you have to endure any hardships?"*

*Shepherd: "Oh, yes sir! A great many; but then I don't have as many temptations as those people who live in the midst of towns, and I have more time for meditating upon my God. So I am perfectly satisfied that where God has placed me is the best position I could be in."*

The Shepherd is content with where he is and finds no reason to quarrel with God about his circumstances. The Shepherd is meek.

Jesus called himself meek, *"For I am gentle and humble in heart."* (Matthew 11:29) Jesus was not provoked to criticism when unduly criticised because of his teaching and the actions he undertook in healing many, and the company he kept with sinners. Jesus didn't take personal offence at all this unjustified hostility. Jesus dealt kindly with friends who were unfaithful to him and failed him such as Peter did with his triple denial of Jesus before his crucifixion. Finally Jesus was gentle with the lost. Jesus sought them out, forgave them, repeatedly explained the truth about the Kingdom of God to them, and consistently showed them how to live a life pleasing to his Father in Heaven. We could not seek a better example of meekness!

The blessing endowed on the meek was to inherit the earth. This appears to be a reference to Psalm 37:11 *"The meek will inherit the land."* It is a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. God will give the land to the meek, not the powerful. In the Old Testament the land the people of Israel were to inherit was actual land which they could put to use for their survival, to grow crops, to breed animals, and to erect temples.

The land of the New Testament is a heavenly land. It is the new heavens and the new earth as described in Revelation 21 and 22. The people were no longer a single nation but were from many nations, spoke many different languages and lived in different cultures. Hebrews 3-4 talks about those who believe and trust in Jesus inheriting the rest he has promised them. This rest is both an earthly and heavenly rest. The rest that we continue to long for is the promise of a new earth and a new heaven that will be fully consummated when Jesus returns to bring all of his people to himself to sit with him at the right hand of God the Father. Those who are God's people can enjoy a taste of it now as we trust in and rely on him and are obedient to his will.

Hunger and thirst are basic drivers for a healthy life necessary for our continued existence. So it is for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This desire is so strong that without it they cannot wholly exist. Their existence is not complete. This hunger and thirst for righteousness can only be given by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. There is no way we can truly desire righteousness if we do not know Jesus. Without knowing Jesus the Holy Spirit cannot dwell within us. Without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us we will not long for righteousness.

This passionate, spiritual desire to be righteous is the longing to be totally right with God, and to be totally free of sin. The only way we can be made righteous with God is by faith. The only way we can be justified by God is through faith. The only way we can be saved by God is through faith. This faith is faith in Jesus and the work he did for us on the cross. Righteousness, justification and salvation is achieved through the grace of God and the faith given us by the Holy Spirit to believe in and trust in the saving work of Jesus' death and resurrection.

While we know we have been saved through faith in Jesus we know we continue to struggle with sin in our lives. It is the process of sanctification that is being called for in this verse. The person who is to be filled is the one who willingly seeks to continually grow as Jesus' disciple. It is the person who hungers and thirsts after a deep and meaningful understanding of what it means to be in fellowship with Jesus and of being made right in God's sight. This person knows he is not yet completely righteous, still struggles with sin and like Paul declares, *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do;"* (Romans 7:15) and *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* (Romans 7:24-25)

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. This filling is a gracious gift from God alone. He only can fill us and make us complete in himself. This passionate search for righteousness can only be longed for by a transformed heart, a heart filled by the Holy Spirit thus causing us to seek righteousness and to wholeheartedly strive for justice and peace, a longing for all people to know God as we do for that is the only way they will know peace and be filled by the righteousness of God himself. This gift is clearly explained in Ephesians 2:1-10:

*"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

In Thomas Watson's (Blanchard, page 150) words: "God keeps open house for hungry sinners." We can rest in the knowledge that God will provide; "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3)

## **Bible Study 2**

### **Think about:**

Have you ever received an inheritance or a special gift? If so was it within or beyond your expectations? What was your response? How did you feel towards the giver of the gift/inheritance?

### **Read Matthew 5:5-6**

*<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

### **Bible Study Questions:**

1. What is your immediate response to these verses?
2. What do you think 'blessed' means in the context of the Beatitudes?
3. Jesus described himself as being "meek and lowly of heart." What do you think it means for a Christian to be meek?
4. How might you display characteristics of meekness in your relationships?

5. The meek will inherit the earth. What do you think this means?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. The blessings given here in the Beatitudes are both a present and a future promise. The blessing for the meek is to inherit the earth, the heavenly earth as spoken about in Hebrews 3-4 and Revelation 21-22. How do we experience it now? What has been your experience of this blessing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. We hunger for food and we thirst for water. These are the essentials of life and without them we will die. What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? Does it mean we will die if these Biblical needs are not met?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. The Beatitudes talk about those who hunger and thirst not those who are hungry and thirsty. These people were actively searching for their needs to be met. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? If hungering and thirsting for righteousness is a mark of a Christian how can your friends or acquaintances know that you hunger and thirst for righteousness?

9. Righteousness, justification and sanctification are all related to being in a right relationship with God. How do these words fit with the fact that the blessings are to be received here and now, and also in the future?

10. Read the following passages:

- (a) **1 Timothy 6:11** says, "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and **pursue righteousness**, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."
- (b) **2 Corinthians 3:18** says, "we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being **transformed into his image** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."
- (c) **Romans 12:1** says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, **holy** and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."
- (d) **2 Timothy 1:9** says, "He has saved us and called us to a **holy life**—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time."
- (e) **1 Peter 1:15-16** says, "But just as he who called you is holy, so **be holy** in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."
- (f) **2 Peter 3:11-14** says, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to **live holy and godly lives** as you look forward to the day of God and speed it's coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where **righteousness** dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."

How do these passages relate to hunger and thirst after righteousness?



11. The blessing for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness is that they will be filled. Read the following passages:

(a) **John 4:13-14:** *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

(b) **John 6: 35-40:** *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup> But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. <sup>40</sup> For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."*

In the light of these two passages what do you think it means to be 'filled'?

12. **2 Peter 3:18** says, *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

(a) If being filled means that we come to be more like Jesus, how will others see that we are making progress as we hunger and thirst for righteousness?

(b) How might they react as they see us growing in grace and kindness, being meek and gentle, showing humility and becoming more and more like Jesus as we know him better?

(c) As we long for righteousness our goal is surely that we live lives that bring honour and praise to our God and draws his people to him. Think about how your behaviour might draw others to Jesus.

**Concluding thoughts:**

Two of the marks of being a Christian are that we are meek and we hunger and thirst for righteousness. Neither of these behaviours is easily achieved because it is only by the grace of God that we are able to be meek. It is only by the grace of God we are chosen to be his children who want to hunger and thirst for righteousness. It is only when the Holy Spirit dwells in us that we will hunger and thirst for righteousness. Jesus himself said, *"No one is good but One, that is God."* (Luke 18:19)

However we have this promise to hold on to from 2 Corinthians 5:17  
"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Because of Jesus' gift to us, our great God sees us as righteous before him. Therefore we can enjoy the blessing of inheriting the earth and being filled with righteousness. We can know that as we continue to long to become more and more like Jesus we will enjoy a taste of these blessings now. We will completely enjoy them when Jesus returns to bring all those who love him to the new heaven, the place that he has prepared for us.

What a blessing!!!!

# The Beatitudes

## Matthew 5:1-16

<sup>1</sup>. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup>. and he began to teach them. He said: <sup>3</sup>. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." <sup>5</sup>. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup>. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup>. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup>. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. <sup>13</sup>. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. <sup>14</sup>. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

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## Background to Bible Study 3:

This Bible Study will examine verses 7 & 8 of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

John Blanchard says in his book "The Beatitudes for Today" (page 161) that, *"The Beatitudes are not a map showing us the way to salvation, but a mirror reflecting the character of those who are already saved."* I'm not sure that I entirely agree with him on this point for if it were so I would be a much nicer person than I think I am. I think that it might mean it is like a mirror in the sense that because of what Jesus has done for us this is how God sees us. But we are not in heaven yet. Jesus has not yet come to bring us to himself in heaven so we continue to live in this world and do the best we can with the help of the Holy Spirit. Day by day we try to live our lives in a manner that will bring glory to God and bring his people back to him. I, like Paul, continue to struggle to live a holy life. It is a constant battle. I hope I am getting better at it with the wisdom that comes with age and experience but I am not yet holy or without sin. Despite my imperfections I do know that I have a hope to look forward to that is eternal, everlasting and enduring. This is Jesus' promise to me and to all who love him.

The previous four Beatitudes seem to be more about our relationship with God. The following Beatitudes continue to focus on our relationship with God but include our actions towards others.

Mercy can be both a feeling and an action. We feel sympathy or empathy towards another but they won't know that unless we show it to them in our actions towards them. What makes us show mercy? We are inherently sinful. We are not by nature kind and thoughtful towards others. Our natural leaning is to look after ourselves first and others next. Yet those of us who love Jesus can be merciful to others because he was first merciful toward us. We have been to the depths of despair as we search for significance and meaning for our lives finding it only in Jesus. Our response to his mercy is to be merciful to others remembering all that Jesus did for us. We want to share what we have with those who have nothing. Our gifts will be both physical and spiritual. We will give to the poor, to the lonely, to the broken hearted. We will also share with them the best gift of all. The gift of knowing Jesus and all he has done for them. As we do this God will continue to heap mercy upon us. What an amazing blessing, to receive the mercy of God continually!

As you think about what it means to be merciful the following statements by D. Edmund Hiebert (Blanchard, Page 180) may be helpful.

- (a)"Mercy means giving help regardless of the person in need.
- (b)Mercy prefers to deal with the needy in terms of what is needed rather than what is deserved.
- (c)Mercy does not insist on its rights, but it is prepared to forfeit them for the sake of the greater good.
- (d)Mercy does not demand everything that is legally due, but is willing to make concessions on the basis of love and concern.
- (e)Mercy does not retaliate in the face of criticism.
- (f)Mercy has defective hearing when rumours are flying around and refuses to join in condemnation without cause.
- (g)Mercy seeks to understand situations that at times seem beyond understanding.
- (h)Mercy is always prepared to give the benefit of the doubt.
- (i)Mercy extends beyond the human race to all God's creatures."

Mercy, I believe, also means offering forgiveness whether or not it is earned or asked for. How can we possibly do any of these things without the help of the Holy Spirit in us?

What does it mean to be 'pure in heart'? The heart brings to mind our innermost longings and feelings. It makes us think about the centre of our being, the place from which all things have their beginning. It makes us think about our conscience, our motives, our thoughts our decisions, our actions, our longings and desires.

In Romans 10:10 we are told our heart is the centre of our faith, *"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."* We are also encouraged in Hebrews 3:12 to *"see to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."*

If the heart is the centre of our faith and if we have a believing heart that turns directly to him at all times then we will be pure in heart. If our God is the centre of our lives, if we take direction and guidance from him and allow him to motivate our thoughts, motives, directions and actions then we will be pure in heart. If Jesus is at the centre of our being we will be pure in heart.

Purity in heart is not about perfection as none of us can be perfect in this lifetime. It is about being sincere and honest. It is about having integrity and credibility as God's people. It is about living our lives as Jesus would have us live them, at all times seeking to bring glory to him thus causing the world to seek Jesus. The pure in heart are called to proclaim Jesus as *"the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ."* (Colossians 1:28)

The characteristics that people see in us are the revelation of what dwells within our hearts. So we say that people are big-hearted, soft-hearted or cold-hearted. If we are seen to be God's people through the way we live then we are showing the world what it means to be pure in heart, like Jesus.

The pure in heart will see Jesus. A blessing that we know is true. We know it to be a heavenly blessing but in a sense we know it is true for us now. Those of us who know Jesus, know we have seen him. If seeing is understanding then understanding is seeing. Jesus presented us to himself when we first met him, understood who he is and so became a child of the Kingdom of God. We are not like those who do not know Jesus for *"the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* (2 Corinthians 4:4) The reverse of this passage is true for those who are saved. We can see the light of the Gospel, that it does display the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

We catch glimpses of God in his people. We see God in his creation and in history, in that we see his acts of mercy towards his people through the Old Testament period, then the New Testament period and today. We see God in the Scriptures, through prayer and when we are prepared to look we will see him in our circumstances both the good and the difficult. We can be encouraged by these words: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

The full impact of this blessing will not be experienced in our time here on earth but we will see him face to face at the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven. This promise is reflected in Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:12, *"For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*

## Bible Study 3

### Think about:

What does mercy mean to you? What does a pure heart mean to you?

### Read Matthew 5:7-8

*7. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

### Bible Study Questions:

1. Have you ever been shown mercy? What does it feel like? Have you shown mercy to others? What did that feel like? Is it easier to receive than to give or vice versa?

### 2. Read Matthew 18:21-35

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

*<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

*<sup>23</sup> "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*

*<sup>26</sup> "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.*

*<sup>28</sup> "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.*

*<sup>29</sup> "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'*

*<sup>30</sup> "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

*<sup>32</sup> "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' <sup>34</sup> In anger his*

*master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

<sup>35</sup> *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

What does this parable tell us about the true nature of mercy?

3. The following words on mercy by Heibert, I have included in the introduction:

- a) Mercy means giving help regardless of the person in need.
- b) Mercy prefers to deal with the needy in terms of what is needed rather than what is deserved.
- c) Mercy does not insist on its rights, but it is prepared to forfeit them for the sake of the greater good.
- d) Mercy does not demand everything that is legally due, but is willing to make concessions on the basis of love and concern.
- e) Mercy does not retaliate in the face of criticism.
- f) Mercy has defective hearing when rumours are flying around and refuses to join in condemnation without cause.
- g) Mercy seeks to understand situations that at times seem beyond understanding.
- h) Mercy is always prepared to give the benefit of the doubt.
- i) Mercy extends beyond the human race to all God's creatures.

What is your response to this list? Can you think of any examples of these actions in your life, either when you have offered one of them or received one of them?

4. Those who love Jesus and choose to serve him have experienced the mercy of God. Is it really possible to offer mercy when we have had no experience of the mercy of God? Think about this question in relation to general (the mercy that God shows all his creatures and people i.e. rain and sunshine etc) and saving mercy, as you examine the following verses:

### **Acts 17:24-28**

<sup>24</sup> *"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. <sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*

### **Hebrews 1:3**

*"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."*

### **Matthew 5:44-45**

<sup>44</sup> *"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*

### **Ephesians 2:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

5. In the Gospels both preaching and healing occur. How do you prioritise the act of compassion and offering help to others over the act of sharing the Gospel with others? They are both acts of mercy. Do we always need to offer them together or one before the other or one at a time?



6. Verse 8 says, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.*" What do you think the following words mean in this context?

*(You might like to ask members of your group to look up these verses in advance to be ready to share them when needed.)*

a) **Pure** (Matthew 23:27; 2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 6:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Timothy 2:22; 2 Peter 3:18)

b) **Heart** (Psalm 28:7; Mark 12:30; John 12:40; Acts 2:36-37; Hebrews 3:12 & 4:12; Romans 10:10)

c) **See** (God) (John 14:9; Romans 1:20; Psalm 22:28; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Timothy 2:22; 2 Corinthians 15:58; Romans 8:28)

7. In the light of your discoveries from the previous question how would you rewrite the Beatitude, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God?*"

8. How can we express our purity in heart in a day by day context?

9. It is difficult to begin to understand what it will be like in heaven. What do you think it will be like when we see Jesus 'face to face'?

**Concluding thoughts:**

Mercy is closely tied to forgiveness. Jesus forgives those who turn to him by faith and mercifully offers us a place beside him in the Kingdom of Heaven. How much will we want to show mercy to others because we have received mercy from God himself? It is impossible to think about mercy without thinking about what that mercy cost Jesus. It is therefore impossible to really understand mercy until you have received true mercy from God and when we do understand it we desperately want those we love to know and experience that mercy too.

Because Jesus has brought us into a new relationship with him he has given us clean, pure hearts. Jesus has wiped away our sins and because of this we can approach him with confidence knowing he won't turn away from us but will in fact reach out to us and hold us and keep us safe. He will do this for eternity. While we now see a mere reflection of his holiness in those who love him we will one day see him face to face in all his heavenly glory. Then we will rejoice with him and all those who love him.

Being merciful and having a pure heart can only be achieved through the grace of God dwelling within those who love him. As we respond to his love for us by being merciful and living holy, pure lives we can be assured that we will receive the dual blessing of his continued mercy here and now and the amazing privilege of seeing God face to face in his Heavenly Kingdom.

# The Beatitudes

## Matthew 5:1-16

<sup>1</sup>. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup>. and he began to teach them. He said: <sup>3</sup>. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." <sup>5</sup>. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup>. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup>. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup>. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. <sup>13</sup>. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. <sup>14</sup>. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

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## Background to Bible Study 4:

This final study concentrates on verses 9-15 beginning with the Beatitudes of verses 9-10 followed by a deeper explanation of them in verses 11-12 and finishing with the challenge to be both salt and light as we live as children of the Kingdom of Heaven found in verses 13-15.

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."*

Peacemakers are people we admire as we experience them in our day to day lives as well as on the larger world front. One of the most impressive on the world scene was Jimmy Carter, once a president of the United States of America. He had a significant influence in regard to finding a way through the Middle East drama focussing on Human Rights. A most impressive man known to be a Christian not only in words but in his heart.

While we long for peace, history shows us that we are not very good at achieving it. John MacArthur was known to have said, "Peace is merely that brief moment in history when everyone stops to reload." In terms of world peace we have very little experience of it over the ages. This can be attested to by the daily news reports we are confronted with today. These troubles and tribulations have been going on since the days of Noah when *"the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence."* (Genesis 6:11) While

many have attempted to achieve peace little has changed since Noah's days. James 4:1-2 shows us the root cause of our lack of peace, *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God."* We continue to put ourselves before God and others.

To be at peace is something we all long for and it includes all aspects of our lives, including our relationship with God, with others, and with the world at large. It is not easy to achieve. Yet this Beatitude, which declares another mark of a Christian, shows us that all Christians are to display the trait of the peacemaker.

On a day to day basis many of us know people who act as go-betweens to ensure a calm path between friends, family members and communities is experienced. These people have an amazing gift. Yet it is interesting that the peacemaker is not listed in the Gifts of the Spirit found in Ephesians 4:7-13, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and Romans 12:3-8. These gifts are separately given to individuals for the building up of the body of Christ. We do not all have the same gifts of the Spirit.

However, peacemaking is a characteristic of all Christians, to be used as necessary both within the body of Christ and for reconciliation between all peoples. Peacemakers are those who leave us with the sense of having been heard, listened to and respected. Peacemakers are those who prayerfully take action to achieve a non contentious reconciliation between opposing parties. They will work long and hard to achieve a positive outcome for all involved.

The greatest work of the peacemaker is to contribute to the reconciliation between God and his children. Evangelism is an important and necessary role for all God's children to undertake. Evangelism is the ultimate peacemaking activity for as we share Jesus with the 'world' we give all people the opportunity to reconcile themselves to God. It is only when we are at peace with God that those deep longings in our hearts are met. Our evangelism or ultimate peacemaking is sharing the message of the Gospel, sharing the truth about Jesus and his saving work through his birth, life, death and resurrection. Being at one with Jesus unites us with one another and helps us to show the world what it looks and feels like to know true peace.

The blessing for peacemakers is that they will be called children of God. This is a blessing that we can enjoy in the here and now but will be fully achieved when Jesus returns to call us to our place in heaven. This place has been prepared for us in advance. This is the inheritance we are assured of when we become children of God. This is the hope we hang on to through all of life's circumstances. This truth can be found in 1 Peter 1:3-9 *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given*

*us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."*

Revelation 21:1-7 gives us a clear picture of the inheritance that will be given to those who love Jesus: *"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. <sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

*<sup>6</sup> He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children."*

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

Please take careful note that those who will be blessed are those who will be persecuted for **righteousness** sake. In verse 11 Jesus makes it very clear that this blessing will only be offered to those who are persecuted for standing up for him. The Kingdom of Heaven will be given to those who carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20. Here Jesus disciples are told to "go and make disciples of all nations." It will be those who share the truth of the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus who will enjoy this blessing.

If we are genuine disciples of Jesus we can expect to be persecuted. All those who suffer insults, snide comments, open contempt, false accusations and for some injury and death because they stand up for Jesus will be honoured by Jesus' promise of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the final mark of the Christian as described in the Beatitudes. But Jesus goes on to say in verse 23 that we are to rejoice and be glad for our reward will be great. We

will be blessed with membership of the Kingdom of Heaven. The best picture is again found in Revelation 21:1-7.

Jesus concludes his list of Christian attributes found in the Beatitudes and the subsequent blessings by throwing out a challenge. We are to be the salt of the earth and the light to the world so that many may "see our good works and thus glorify our Father in heaven."

## Bible Study 4

### Think about:

The key verse for the Sermon on the Mount is probably Matthew 6:8, "Do not be like them." How have you achieved this? In what ways have you tried to be different while still living in this world? Is it easy or not? Where do you go for help?

### Read Matthew 5:9-16

*<sup>9.</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*<sup>10.</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11.</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

*<sup>12.</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

*<sup>13.</sup> "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. <sup>14.</sup> "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15.</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16.</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

### Bible Study Questions:

1. John Stott declares that Christians are to live as though we are members of a 'counter-culture'. Matthew 6:8 says, "Do not be like them." How do we display our difference as a peacemaker?
2. In what way does being a peacemaker make us a member of a 'counter-culture'? (James 4:1-2; Galatians 5:22-23)

3. We've all had some experience seeing a peacemaker at work, in the home, with friends, or neighbours or work colleagues. What impressed you most about their actions? How can we copy their behaviour so we can follow Jesus' exhortation to "not be like them"?
4. As a son or a daughter we can generally be confident that we will be included in an inheritance from our earthly parents. What does it mean to you to be called a 'son' or 'child' of God?
5. As 'sons' of God we will reflect his character. Thinking back to the previous Beatitudes in what ways will our characters reflect that of our heavenly Father?
6. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is the only Beatitude that appears to have a condition attached to it. This reward will be given to those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Jesus clarifies what he means by persecution with vs11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute (accuse) you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

In what ways have you experienced this kind of persecution? How did you handle it? What was the outcome? Given the opportunity how would you deal with similar circumstances now?



7. The reward for the persecuted is the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the eternal hope that those who love Jesus can depend on. What is the image that immediately comes to you when you think of the Kingdom of Heaven?
8. Revelation 21-22:6 gives us a clear description of what the Kingdom of Heaven will look like. It also gives us a picture of what it will be like to live in God's Heavenly Kingdom. How do these verses resonate with your answer to the previous question? What are you most looking forward to?
9. The challenge to be the salt of the earth and a light to the world is a huge one. Think about this in terms of the characteristics of a Christian as described in the Beatitudes. How do the Beatitudes challenge you to ensure your good deeds glorify your Heavenly Father?
10. How has your increased understanding of the Beatitudes better prepared you to play your part in executing Jesus' Great Commission?

**Matthew 28:16-20:** "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

## **Concluding thoughts**

Poverty of spirit, (recognising I can do nothing of value without first understanding that only Jesus will make me whole); Mourning sin (both mine and others); Being meek and hungering and thirsting for righteousness; Being merciful and pure in heart; Being a peacemaker and suffering persecution; These are all marks of a Christian.

Personally, I have found studying the Beatitudes extremely challenging. As I have delved deeply into each of these characteristics I have realised that I fail to some degree in all of them. They have challenged me to take a very hard look at my Christian life and to think more on the impact of my life on those with whom I come into contact. It has challenged me to wonder how my life has influenced people to look to Jesus both within the church context and the outside world. I know that I will never know the full answer to this thought but my hope is that my actions and words present Jesus to those who don't know him and cause them to want to know him as their Lord and Saviour.

What is outstanding in regards these Beatitudes as they list the characteristics of God's own people is that I know that because of what Jesus has done for me and because I have put my faith and trust in him, my heavenly Father sees me sinless, and with a clean pure heart. He sees me as the Beatitudes describe me. I am his child and he will not ever let go of me. I am eternally grateful for the assurance of his promise of a place in his Kingdom and my response is to love him and return his love for me by dedicating my life to serving him in an effort to bring many to know Jesus as I do.

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