

The Sermon on the Mount - Blessings and Curses

I have really enjoyed looking at the life and teachings of Jesus, so far. But I think the best is coming!
Why is that?

Well so far we have mainly looked at the life of Jesus, Jesus in eternity, Jesus in the OT, his birth and some of his miracles. But now we are getting into his teaching and what he had to say to those around him, and how his teachings are timeless and as relevant to us today as they were when they were first preached just under 2000 years ago.

Today we will look at the first part of one of Jesus most famous messages "the sermon on the mount"

Friends, what Jesus has to say to us is important! We need to listen, we need to tune out sometimes from the noise around us, be quiet and listen.

Last night we had a power cut, the boys were asleep in bed, the whole street was quiet. The TV didn't work, and the laptop power doesn't last for long.... It was so quiet. We fill our lives with so much noise, TV, Radio, Mobile Phones, iPods, Music etc...

Do we stop to listen to God?

Please can I ask you as we listen and then look at the words of Jesus, we still our hearts and hear what he might say to each of us, individually and as a church.

So let's turn to Luke 6 then Matthew 5 as a similar message is preached in both places.

[Luke 6:17-26](#)

[Blessings and Woes](#)

[17](#) He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, [18](#) who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, [19](#) and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

[20](#) Looking at his disciples, he said:

["Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.](#)

[21](#) [Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.](#)

[Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.](#)

[22](#) [Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.](#)

23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24 "But woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your comfort.

25 Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.

26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Matthew 5:1-12

1 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.

PRAY.

So Jesus is teaching, he has been speaking to a crowd that had gathered to see him do miracles, or maybe be healed themselves, to be delivered from evil spirits, to see who this man was that walked in amazing power.

They wanted to hear what he had to say, just as the temple priests had picked up 18 years earlier, Jesus spoke with such wisdom and power, what he said was important to people.

So here we have the 2 accounts with a very similar message, some say it was two separate occasions, others say it was the same

Matthew passage talks about being on a mountainside and the Luke passage saying he spoke from a level place (Greek word – Plateau).

I'm not sure it really matters; the main thing is that Jesus had a message to bring to his followers and he may have repeated the message a few times to drum it into his followers, I know I don't always get things the first time I hear something.

So we know there are quite a few people around, but who is Jesus addressing as he begins his preach? In both accounts, it is clear that Jesus is addressing his disciples.

Looking at his disciples, he said (Luke)

His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. (Matthew)

Jesus is speaking to his followers.

I'd like us to look at a couple of things from this passage today.

1. Is it a guide to how we should live?
2. Where do the beatitudes lead us?

Is it a guide to how we should live?

OK, lets get straight to the biggest question people have about this passage... is Jesus telling his followers what life should look like?

Let's look at the subjects that are picked up, in Matthews Gospel there are 8 in Luke's 4. Matthew just lists the blessed are and Luke gives an opposing response to the 4 he lists.

- 1 – Blessed are the poor /poor in Spirit (M/L)
- 2 – Blessed are those who weep/mourn (M/L)
- 3 – Blessed are the meek
- 4 – Blessed are those who are hungry/hunger and thirst for righteousness (M/L)
- 5 – Blessed are the merciful
- 6 – Blessed are the pure in heart
- 7 – Blessed are the peacemakers
- 8 – Blessed are those who are persecuted. (M/L)

As you can see there are some slight differences between the common blessings, Matthew tends to spiritualise the blessing, whereas Luke picks up the physical aspects.

And remember Luke goes further and adds curses to increase the starkness of the blessings.

Is this a list of qualifications for how to be a follower of Christ? Is Jesus saying, you are blessed when you fit into these categories and cursed if you do not, is this a prescription of how those who follow Jesus should live?

Hmmm... Prescriptive v's descriptive

I'm not sure Jesus is being prescriptive in all of these categories of how we should behave, but Jesus is being descriptive of the people that God does bless.

Don't forget what Jesus has just been doing, he has been healing the sick and been followed by the poor and broken, he is saying that there is no-one beyond Gods reach, poor, broken, mourning, meek and persecuted. Even here in your dire circumstances, you have just experienced the Kingdom of God as it is coming in me, Jesus Christ, and is made available to everyone through Jesus. Many of these Beatitudes are not good things to be. It is not a good thing to be poor, or mourning, or even meek and run all over. Those are not things to strive for. In fact, those are things that God calls us to eliminate, and to be bold for him. But what Jesus is saying is that even if you are in those awful situations, God is there, he heals, and he can make his blessings known.

If we looked at these prescriptive we get into trouble...

P – Only blessed if you are poor – this is not true! Therefore if you are rich you are cursed?

That is a nonsense! Doesn't every good blessing come from God?

What fulfils us? Is it wealth or is it Jesus.

The issue here is the heart.

The bible isn't a rule book, it is a biography, it's about Jesus....and he is interested in the heart attitude.

Jesus is not saying you will become children of God if you tick all these "qualifications" if that were true, none of us would be children of God, We must remember that we become children of God by faith alone.

Many churches are finding greatest breakthrough when reaching out to the poor, the broken, those who are mourning and those who are persecuted, why is this? It is because when people are in these situations, what else can you put your faith and trust in other than Jesus, he is our only hope, and his message of hope is for everyone.

What are we striving for? These blessings and curses strike right to the heart of our western materialistic culture which says: blessed are the smart, the beautiful, the rich, the popular.

Jesus came so that we might have life in all its fullness. I am certain therefore he is not saying to us be poor, mourn /weep all the time, love persecution and are hungry.

But he is saying that his gospel is for everyone.

Now we can see from Matthews account, that there are some things we can do that Jesus says we can be blessed for that will allow us to help those who need to know that Jesus can save them. We need to be those who show mercy, who have pure hearts, that bring peace into different situations.

The message of Grace is for everyone, not just those who have things sewn up etc. remember it is God who set the qualifications for salvation, and it has nothing to do with our circumstances. The thing that qualifies us for salvation, it Jesus death and resurrection.

The second thing I'd like us to look at from these accounts is.

Where do the beatitudes lead us?

As Jesus spelt these things out, there was only one person who could truly achieve all of this.. Jesus himself.

I wonder whether the whole point of the beatitudes is for us to associate with Jesus himself, the only perfect example of all of these things.

Rob Warner says : 'The Beatitudes are supremely Jesus' self-description — together they represent the finest summary of both the character and the blessedness of Christ himself.

I love this, It is all about Jesus, even when he is preaching to his followers, or to us, he is the centre of the whole thing. None of us can achieve all these things, but Jesus has, and he wants us to focus on the grace that he pours out upon us as we live to serve him and reach out to those around us.

Everything about Christianity, should be about the ones whose name it bears, Christ.

Phil 2 1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.