

The Kingdom of God – Part 2

ILLUS – For those of us who were born in cold countries, we know what it's like to turn on the tap and have nothing come out. Not because of drought, not because there is anything wrong with the water supply, or the pipes. But there is a blockage in the pipes. The water has frozen.

In God's Kingdom, there is something that blocks God's blessing, and something that releases God's blessing. Sin blocks God's blessing, but obedience to God releases His blessing.

We're continuing today to look at the beatitudes.

The word "beatitude" means blessedness.

The beatitudes give us the secret to the blessing of God.

Matt 5:1-12

What is the blessing of God?

Is it being rich? Then Bill Gates is the most blessed man on earth.

Is it reflected in the size of our church?

If it is, then we already know who will sit at the right hand of Jesus in the next life – Yonggi Cho, who easily has the largest church in the world.

These things can be part of God's blessing, but the blessings of the Kingdom are primarily spiritual.

Because the Kingdom is spiritual.

John 18:36 Jesus answered (Pilate), "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Paul understood this too.

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

The beatitudes tell us what these spiritual blessings are.

The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Those who mourn will be comforted.

The meek shall inherit the earth.

The satisfaction of righteousness will be given to those who hunger and thirst for it.

The merciful shall obtain mercy.

The pure in heart shall see God.

The peacemakers will be called sons of God.

This is the true nature of God's blessing.

But how do I obtain the blessing of God?

By fulfilling the conditions.

In our first message on this topic, we saw what some of those conditions are.

We're continuing to look at those conditions in this message, because I want you to be truly blessed.

5. The merciful

I am not a naturally merciful person. When I watch a movie, I want to see the bad guy get what's coming to him.

The trouble is, when I stand before God, I don't want to receive what I deserve: I want mercy.

Mercy is when you treat someone with less severity than he deserves.

Mercy is the exercise of compassion and gentleness.

Let's put this into a church context.

ILLUS – A number of years ago, a man in our church (let's call him Peter), was one of those responsible for taking an offering bag into a back room to be counted. There were a number of them, and they all went through a corridor behind the stage, left the bags with the offering-counters, and returned to the service. One day, a lady went to the pastor and said, "God has given me a word of knowledge. Peter is stealing from the offering." They worked out a way they could verify this, and it turned out to be true.

ILLUS – An English prophet – Graham Cooke – was praying for a man with marriage difficulties. Suddenly, God gave him a vision. He saw the man enter the Connaught Hotel, described what he was wearing, described the man at reception, described the woman he was with, saw them take room 213. The man he was praying for turned white and started to shake. He had been having an affair with an office girl for three years.¹

How does the church generally respond to circumstances like these, when people are caught out in sin – stealing, lying, adultery?

Often it's one of two equally unhelpful extremes – either ignore it, or bring out the big stick: punish them, ostracise them, kick them out of the church.

But ignoring it encourages it.

Rejection and punishment doesn't help either.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful..."

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

So how is the church to respond to those who sin, to the backslidden, to the rebellious?

With mercy, and when we show mercy to others, God says we will become the recipients of mercy too.

We have the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18)

Our job is to restore that person, not ignore what they've done, or respond with rejection and punishment.

6. The pure in heart

God is a holy God, and He looks for purity.

And He doesn't look at things like we do – He looks at the heart.

1 Sam 16:7 ... For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

Here are some questions to ask yourself if you're wondering if you have a pure heart:

When my mind slips into neutral, what do I think about?

What sort of people do I like hanging around with, and why?

What sorts of things do I like talking about? Do I like talking about spiritual things? Do I initiate discussions on spiritual things?

What sorts of things do I watch on TV?

What are my motives for doing what I do? Reward? The approval of others?

Do I come to church just for what I can get out of it, or for what I can contribute and do for others?

If you would be embarrassed to answer some of those questions, how do you get a pure heart?

Prov 17:3 The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts.

God puts us through things that purify us like gold.

ILLUS – I inherited a gold watch from my father. It's beautiful gold, but it's not pure. The thing with pure gold is that it's so soft.

A pure heart is a soft heart.

If you're going through a tough time, don't forget that God is doing a purifying work in your life.

The pure in heart shall see God.

Obviously, we'll have to wait till the next life to actually see Him.

But God reveals Himself, gives revelation, to those who are pure in heart.

ILLUS – Saul consulted a medium: (1 Sam 28:15) Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."

What blocked Saul's access to God? What blocked his ability to hear God speak? Sin.

But purity clears the way so God can speak to us and show us things.

7. The peacemakers

ILLUS – In over 3,000 years of recorded history, the world has been at peace in only 8% of that time.² Between 1945 and 1988, about 20 million people died in 91 wars.³

ILLUS – Australian Bureau of Statistics: Statistics for 2002 – 318 murders, 396 attempted murders, 159,548 assaults, 17,850 sexual assaults, 696 kidnappings / abductions, 7,817 armed robberies, 292,769 unlawful entries with taking of property, 344 cases of blackmail / extortion. In 1997 there were an estimated 74,000 dependent heroin users.

If there's anything this world needs it's peace.

It's easy to talk about it, sing about it, campaign for it – but nobody yet has been able to bring peace to this world.

Jesus, of course, wasn't talking about avoiding trouble or difficulties.

Clearly, we should never sacrifice the truth for the sake of peace.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield ...

Notice the order of priority here? Purity first, then peace.

Lots of people have it the other way around.

ILLUS – For instance, parents who give in to their children's demands saying to their children, "Okay, anything for peace!"

It's not talking about that kind of peace, so what does it mean?

It's talking about right relationships.

Some people are trouble-makers.

God wants us to be peacemakers.

Jesus is the perfect example of this.

He made peace between us and God through the cross.

He makes peace between people by dealing with the sin and pride that bring contention.

How can we be peacemakers?

By being the kind of people who pour oil on troubled waters.

We can bring peace by preaching the gospel of peace.

Is 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "your God reigns!"

How can the world experience peace if people don't first have peace in their own hearts?

Peace with men results from peace with God.

Peacemakers are called sons of God.

If your Bible says "children" of God, it's incorrect.

The word for children emphasises the relationship.

But son emphasises character.

ILLUS – If someone calls you a son of a dog, they aren't talking about your parentage. They're talking about your character.

A son of God has taken on the character of God.

8. Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake

The early church suffered enormously for Christ.

Being fed to the lions was a merciful death.

- Nero lit his gardens by wrapping Christians in pitch and setting them alight.
- He sewed others into animal skins and set his dogs onto them to tear them apart.
- Others were tortured on the rack;
- Scraped with pincers;
- Molten lead poured on them;
- Red hot brass plates fixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies;
- Eyes were torn out;
- Parts of their bodies cut off and roasted in front of them;
- Hands and feet burned while cold water was poured on them to increase the pain.⁴

Their only crime was to place Christ above all else.

Also, the early church was constantly faced with choices of loyalty.

ILLUS – If a stonemason was offered a job to build a pagan temple, what was he to do? If a goldsmith was asked to make idols, what was he to do?

ILLUS – Over a century later, a Christian came to Tertullian because of a decision he had to make. "What can I do?" he asked. "I must live!" "Must you?" replied Tertullian.⁵

In many parts of the world, people are still persecuted for being Christians.

ILLUS – In Indonesia, Pastor Cecep was returning home from the airport with his friend Berty. The two men were on their motorbike. Not long into their journey, they came across a roadblock. Berty tried to reason with the extremists, but to no avail. The mob began to beat him, pulled out his teeth, and eventually cut his throat. Pastor Cecep was also tortured. His charred body was found on a beach two days later, with many deep stab wounds.⁶

In North Korea thousands of Christians undergo torture, starvation, imprisonment, and medical experiments.

It's very different for us – persecution in our country is far subtler.

It's not often that people in our country are persecuted for being Christian like they are in other countries.

More likely, we are persecuted for being obedient to the righteous requirements that God has for us as Christians.

We are persecuted for our righteousness, our integrity.

Are we prepared to suffer loneliness or discrimination rather than compromise our faith?

How do we cope when we are ostracised or ridiculed or simply left out because we don't laugh at their dirty jokes?

Or because we don't have stories of our sexual antics to tell?

Or because we won't watch the pornography that's flooded our TVs?

Or because we won't lie, or do shady deals, or cheat on our tax returns?

How do we respond when we are called prudes, narrow-minded, kill-joys?

Do we throw in the towel and say, "If you can't beat them, join them."?

Do we go home crying, with our tails between our legs, complaining to the Lord, and telling all and sundry that we can't wait to get another job, because those big, bad non-Christians keep picking on us?

Or do we respond like Jesus said, rejoicing because we know that the Kingdom of God is ours, and that our reward in heaven will be great?

Friends, we are blessed because we're building up rewards in heaven.

We have constantly to make decisions that may result in difficulties if we choose to put Christ first.

If we must choose between our loyalty to Christ and making a living, what do we choose?

D. A. Carson says, "This final beatitude becomes one of the most searching of all of them, and binds up the rest; for if the disciple of Jesus never experiences any persecution at all, it may fairly be asked where righteousness is being displayed in his life."⁷

2 Tim 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

The great consolation that we have is that God's grace is abundantly available to us.

ILLUS – Nicholas Ridley (1500 – 1555) had been condemned to death for his faith. The night before, his brother offered to stay with him in prison. Ridley said that he planned to sleep as well as usual. The next day he encouraged another Christian who was being executed. "Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it." They knelt and prayed next to the stake, talked briefly, then were burned.

Ask yourself today: Am I merciful? Am I pure in heart? Am I a peacemaker, instead of a trouble-maker? Do I gladly suffer persecution for righteousness' sake and the cause of Christ?

¹ Cooke, Graham *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting* p 63-64

² Tan, Paul Lee *Encyclopaedia Of 7700 Illustrations* No. 4285

³ Llewellyn, Tony *If God Is A God Of Love* p34

⁴ Barclay, William *Daily Study Bible: Vol 1 – Matt 1-10* p 112

⁵ Barclay, William *Daily Study Bible: Vol 1 – Matt 1-10* p 111

⁶ Open Doors letter March 2005 – article on Indonesia.

⁷ Carson, D.A. *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount* p29