

The Sermon on The Mount

Bible Reading – Matthew chapter 5 verses 1 to 12 (AMP)

'When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. ² Then He began to teach them, saying,

³ "Blessed [spiritually prosperous, happy, to be admired] are the poor in spirit [those devoid of spiritual arrogance, those who regard themselves as insignificant], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever].

⁴ "Blessed [forgiven, refreshed by God's grace] are those who mourn [over their sins and repent], for they will be comforted [when the burden of sin is lifted].

⁵ "Blessed [inwardly peaceful, spiritually secure, worthy of respect] are the gentle [the kind-hearted, the sweet-spirited, the self-controlled], for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed [joyful, nourished by God's goodness] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [those who actively seek right standing with God], for they will be [completely] satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed [content, sheltered by God's promises] are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed [anticipating God's presence, spiritually mature] are the pure in heart [those with integrity, moral courage, and godly character], for they will see God.

⁹ "Blessed [spiritually calm with life-joy in God's favour] are the makers and maintainers of peace, for they will [express His character and] be called the sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed [comforted by inner peace and God's love] are those who are persecuted for doing that which is morally right, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever].

¹¹ "Blessed [morally courageous and spiritually alive with life-joy in God's goodness] are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil things against you because of [your association with] Me.

¹² Be glad and exceedingly joyful, for your reward in heaven is great

[absolutely inexhaustible]; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

SERMON

Today I want to take a fresh look at The Sermon on the Mount.

But before we do that, I have a question, and I would like to see a show of hands (only if you want to take part).

How many of you have passed their driving test?

Can you remember what it was like when you were learning?

Some may have been like me and first learned to ride a motor bike or scooter so in a way we had a head start on car drivers didn't we? We got the feel of the road and we had already learned the Highway Code, before taking our car driving test.

Some people love driving and take to it readily. Others are quite timid or frightened, especially perhaps when surrounded by fast moving lorries on mainland motorways (or the Medina Way dual carriageway)!

The Coppins Bridge roundabout is the worst for me. And Zigzag Road in Ventnor. They can both be scary can't they?

What have learner drivers got to do with The Sermon on the Mount?

Well, in verse 1 of today's Scripture reading, it says '***when [Jesus] was seated, His disciples came to Him***'.

His disciples came to Him...

Why did they come to Him?

They came to Him because they were eager to *learn*. They were learners.

They knew He was full of wisdom. The kind of wisdom no ordinary man had ever shared with them. He was like the best driving instructor in the world!

They wanted to learn from somebody they acknowledged as the wisest teacher who ever lived. At this stage of His ministry few even realised Jesus was the Son of God.

They would discover that later.

The Amplified Bible has a footnote to help us understand what a disciple is.

It says **‘A disciple was a “learner” who may have been curious - or convinced - or committed.’**

A learner?

If you and I are Jesus’ disciples today, then we are **learners**.

Depending on the depth of our faith, we may be just curious about Christ; we may be convinced by Him; or totally committed to Him!

I find that definition helpful because, other than in a Biblical context, we don’t use the word ‘disciple’ today, do we? It’s not an everyday term in modern day English.

But in those days, many wise scholars and religious leaders had their own disciples. John the Baptist had his own disciples. And disciples hung off every word their Rabbi spoke to them.

So coming back to learner drivers, there are those amongst us who will just be curious to find out what driving is like and may decide they don’t want to take or pass the test. For them, bicycles, buses and taxis are just fine. There are those who are convinced driving is right for them, and pass their test just in order to use their car to do local chores or travel to and from work - and there are those who are so committed that they go on to become ‘professional drivers’ driving – as I did – more than 40,000 miles every year for 30 years.

You and I, as Christian disciples, are learners, and I believe part of the reason you are here today, is to learn from Jesus. I certainly want to learn from Him. I want to worship Him too!

So what did He have to tell His disciples 2,000 years ago? How valid today are those teachings He shared back in those days of old?

Well in today’s reading, Jesus taught them ten things.

If He wrote these teachings as a Book, it might be called **‘Ten ways that God wants to bless you’**.

And what does it mean ‘to be blessed?’

And the answer, according to the Amplified Bible translators, depends on the context. So we learn from today’s reading it can mean **‘spiritually prosperous, happy, to be admired’** or **‘refreshed by God’s grace’** or **‘inwardly peaceful,**

spiritually secure, worthy of respect' – the meanings are varied, as we will see as we take a look at this reading shortly.

And so a book entitled **'Ten ways that God wants to bless you'** might today be a best seller, because, I don't know about you, but when I ask people I meet in the world 'How are you?' I do not recall a single person reply 'I feel **spiritually prosperous, happy, and inwardly peaceful'**.

And today, if *you* aren't feeling blessed, then listen to the words of Jesus and let Him bless you right away.

As there are ten points, I will go through each one just briefly, and, if you take the typed-up reading away with you, I believe it will give you great encouragement when you are feeling low.

Now, like me, you may well have read the Sermon on the Mount many times, but the Amplified version explains what Jesus is saying far more clearly than any other translation I have read.

So let's begin...

Verse 3 says this:

"Blessed [spiritually prosperous, happy, to be admired] are the poor in spirit [those devoid of spiritual arrogance, those who regard themselves as insignificant], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever]."

I love that verse.

Jesus says if you and I ensure we do not behave in a spiritually arrogant way; if we realise that in the scheme of things you and I as people are pretty insignificant, and you know you still have a lot to learn about God's Kingdom - that you are just a learner - then you are not only spiritually prosperous, happy and to be admired BUT the Kingdom of Heaven is yours, both now AND FOREVER!

In verse 4 Jesus says:

"Blessed [forgiven, refreshed by God's grace] are those who mourn [over their sins and repent], for they will be comforted [when the burden of sin is lifted]."

Here, the translators are pointing out that the Greek word translated 'mourn' refers not to the loss of a loved one, but to our attitude to sin.

When we are sorry for committing acts of sin and repent then we will feel comforted as we feel the weight of those sins lifted by our forgiving God.

In the Old Testament there is Book written by Jeremiah, called Lamentations; it is a short book. It records the great Prophet Jeremiah, lamenting, grieving, and mourning over the fate of God's rebellious people.

Jeremiah expresses his great pain, not because of his own sin, but at the sin of God's people. These were the people He was divinely sent to, to lead them down the path of repentance. He is grieving because they refused to listen to his prophetic warnings and paid the price for their sin.

Jesus says if you will act like Jeremiah over your own sins; that is, tell God how sorry you are, and how you are determined to change (by His grace and with His help), then you will be forgiven, refreshed, and comforted because your burden of sin will be lifted.

Next, in verse 5 we learn that it is the gentle, kind-hearted, and self-controlled who will be blessed. Jesus says if we will become like that we will find ourselves inwardly at peace with the world and worthy of respect. I think this is a lesson for many of us to learn. There seem to be so many noisy people about don't there; they seem to be devoid of any peace in their lives. Michele and I were on the beach one day last week and 3 twenty-something year olds had their music playing from their boom box and were talking to each other at a sound level of about 100 decibels; and a bit later they engaged in an abusive shouting match with a young lady they knew who they clearly didn't like. It's so sad, they seemed to have no peace in their hearts at all. Their language was very colourful too. Jesus really wants to help people like that...

Verse 6 tells us:

“Blessed [joyful, nourished by God's goodness] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [those who actively seek right standing with God], for they will be [completely] satisfied”.

Are you in right standing with God?

You don't need to be *perfect* to be in right standing with God.

Indeed it is *impossible* for you or me or any person in the world or any human who has ever lived to be in right standing with God as a result of some good personal activity or accomplishment. It isn't through undertaking lots of good deeds that we become in right standing with God.

In one of the most important verses in the Bible, we read in Romans chapter 3 and verse 22 that ***'This righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all those [Jew or Gentile] who believe [and trust in Him and acknowledge Him as God's Son].'***

Being in right standing with God is a gift from God. It is freely given to you and me by God's grace, as a result of one thing and one thing only; and that is by the act of believing and trusting in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. That act is a direct act of the will. It is a personal choice. Nobody can make it for you. If you have chosen to believe and trust in Jesus and acknowledge Him as God's Son, Jesus Himself promises in today's Reading that you will be blessed, joyful and nourished by God's goodness.

Next Jesus tells us

"Blessed [content, sheltered by God's promises] are the merciful, for they will receive mercy".

The best way of receiving mercy when you need it, is to be merciful to others each time you have the opportunity. According to the Laws of God, you get back what you give out. The more you give to others, the more God will give to you – if not in this world, in the next.

Jesus when warning us to be careful when judging others says in Matthew chapter 7 verses 1 and 2,

"Do not judge and criticize and condemn [others unfairly with an attitude of self-righteous superiority as though assuming the office of a judge], so that you will not be judged [unfairly].² For just as you [hypocritically] judge others [when you are sinful and unrepentant], so will you be judged; and in accordance with your standard of measure [used to pass out judgment], judgment will be measured to you."

So, those who are merciful will receive mercy. Likewise, those who give away much will receive much, and those who wisely choose not to judge others will not be judged unfairly by God.

How we act towards others determines how God will act towards us.

Verse 8 says...

⁸"Blessed [anticipating God's presence, spiritually mature] are the pure in heart [those with integrity, moral courage, and godly character], for they will see God.

Do you want to see God? Then, says Jesus, be Godly in character, speak and act with integrity at all times.

Next Jesus tells us...

⁹ “Blessed [spiritually calm with life-joy in God’s favour] are the makers *and* maintainers of peace, for they will [express His character and] be called the sons of God.”

Peacemakers are the ‘Sons (and daughters) of God’!

I am working on writing some training modules for Christian Men and in the last few weeks I have been penning a module about resolving conflict with people. I spend a lot of time talking about this verse of Scripture and illustrating the difference between a peacekeeper and a peacemaker. Sadly, there isn’t time to go into this today but suffice to say that, here, Jesus is imploring us to undertake the difficult task of making peace with others as opposed to keeping silent and saying nothing when we are offended, in the hope that the problem will go away. The latter is called peacekeeping and *peacekeeping* is very different to *peace-making*.

This world needs people who will go the extra mile to **make peace**, especially right now in places like Syria and the Yemen. But you don’t need to travel far to use the gift of peace-making. If you know a neighbour who is holding a grudge against somebody, encourage them to work through the issue and make up. Life is too short to hold grudges. “Forgive” says Jesus and God will forgive you.

Next is verse 10:

“Blessed [comforted by inner peace and God’s love] are those who are persecuted for doing that which is morally right, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever].

It’s hard sometimes isn’t it, to do what is right. It is becoming more popular these days to do what is *expedient*. In business, people do what will help them get ahead. I see it all the time. In politics, they will do what will win votes for the party, even if it’s not morally right. The Church will compromise the Word of God if it gets more bums on pews or brings in more money.

I’m sorry to mention that one but my heart is heavy about the state of some parts of the Church today.

Jesus says those who do what is right (in the eyes of God) - even if they are persecuted for doing it - will inherit the Kingdom of God, now and forever. They will enjoy an inner peace too.

Finally Jesus tells us

¹¹ “Blessed [morally courageous and spiritually alive with life-joy in God’s goodness] are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say

**all kinds of evil things against you because of [your association with] Me.
12 Be glad and exceedingly joyful, for your reward in heaven is great
[absolutely inexhaustible]; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.”**

In some countries people are tortured or murdered just because they believe in, and worship Jesus Christ. In the Muslim world, converts to Christianity will be disowned by their families. This verse encourages such people that their reward in Heaven will be absolutely inexhaustible.

And to us in the West, where we are free to practise our faith, I believe Jesus is saying don't be a closet Christian. Speak out about your faith when you get the chance. If people ridicule you because of your faith, don't be put off, but be glad and joyful, because your reward will be great.

I believe the Sermon on the Mount is as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago when Jesus spoke it to His listeners. At first sight, what Jesus teaches is at odds with the so-called 'wisdom-of-the-world'. It can seem illogical or unbelievable in the natural, but that's because God is the God of the super-natural as well as the natural world. All things are possible for Him and all things are made possible to those who believe in Him and follow Him.

I do hope you will reflect on these precious Words of Jesus Christ, the one true God. They were spoken by Him to show us how to receive God's amazing, unmerited blessings. They are freely available to you today.

God bless you all...

Amen

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