

All Saints Day 2023. Matthew 5:1-12 The blessings.

This morning we are looking at the beatitudes we just heard in Matthew's gospel. The word 'beatitude,' is just Latin for blessings, and this morning's reading opens up Jesus first major block of teaching which we call the sermon on the mount and takes up chapters 5-7.

Now the gospel of Matthew is a very Jewish gospel and one of its major themes is that all of the Jewish Law and prophesy is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus can be seen as the new Moses, leading God's people out of slavery, through the wilderness to the Promised Land, which Matthew calls the Kingdom of Heaven. Here Jesus ascends a mountain, just as Moses ascended Mt Sinai to receive the law, to teach the new way of living that characterises the new Promised Land – the new Kingdom of Heaven.

This is what we celebrate in Epiphany that God's people now include the whole world, if they so desire.

Jesus is essentially teaching his disciples, our reading says, but all who would become disciples as well. So these blessings are the starting point of being a disciple. There are big thick books written to define what the word 'blessed' means. But to keep it simple, let's say that if we are blessed by God we enter into a fortunate state.

We are content, worry-free, happy and filled with joy in this fortunate state.

Now last week's gospel says that Jesus began his ministry by urging people to repent. To turn away from worldly selfishness because the Kingdom was near. So these blessing follow all those who would follow and centre their lives on Jesus who is the embodiment of this new Kingdom of Heaven.

Now these blessings can be divided up and identified as coming from three Godly ways of living that show that Jesus is dwelling in us.

Firstly, the first three blessings stem from humility, which is why we speak so much about it. So in vv.3-5, we are blessed when we are poor in spirit, when we mourn, and when we are meek.

Now 'poor in spirit,' refers to realizing that everything inside us pales in comparison with God's greatness and goodness. We are poor compared to God's richness. So the

very Kingdom of Heaven belongs to we who realise that all things come from God and not us.

Mourning is a product of this broken spirit and is actually a gift from God the Holy Spirit that enables us to mourn and grieve that, through sin, we have separated ourselves from God and earnestly want to get back to him. If we mourn, God promises to comfort us.

The meek are those who happily submit to the authority of God. The meek are those who say to God, "you're the boss, your will be done in heaven and earth." It is the desire for us to be lesser and Jesus greater in our live. If we do that we, as co-heirs with Jesus, will inherit the whole earth.

These are some blessings! Yet, the world despises and sees as weak these beautiful traits of humility.

Secondly in the next four blessings in vv.6-9 we see four traits that speak to a person's character or holiness; a yearning for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, and peacemaking.

When it comes to righteousness, we who follow Jesus Christ must desire it so much that we hunger and thirst for it. Ps 42 begins, "as the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you" (ESV Ps 42:1.)

Righteousness is wanting something to be the way that it should be in God's eyes. It is for something to be morally good. Do you hunger and thirst for that? If you do, Jesus says you will be filled! Filled by God! How wonderful is that?

Jesus also says, blessed are the merciful, for the very good reason that God will show us mercy. To be merciful means to not be looking to get even all of the time, but rather to overlook offenses and wrongs done to you.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. We become pure in heart by surrendering our hearts to Jesus, and having our hearts made new. We don't want to desire anything tainted or toxic, we can only have a pure desire given us by surrendering our desires to the Lord.

Finally to have the character of holiness means to be a peacemaker, we will then be blessed with adoption as God's children. We do the opposite of divide our families, friends and church. We build bridges of reconciliation wherever and whenever we can. We *make* peace.

Righteousness, mercy, purity, and peace are all part of the character of God, and we become more and more like that as we enter more fully into the life in Christ.

Our final source of blessings come from persecution, vv.10-12. Those persecuted for righteousness' sake, and when our name is reviled and evil is spoken about us for the sole reason that we are Christians. This happening in the whole world, quite dramatically in many countries, and becoming more common in Australia. Evil is now called good, and good evil.

This was just as odd for the disciples to hear as it is for us. Jews believed it was a sign of blessing when you were respected and successful financially – just as do we in our culture!!

We are blessed when we remain faithful. Above all else we are to remain loving, holy, truthful, good, humble, and righteous. We are not to view our situation in the world in the same way the world does.

The whole Kingdom of Heaven is ours, in this life and in the next. Relax, Jesus is saying. If you remain faithful, you will be blessed. You will be brought into a fortunate place. You will be happy and contented in all the ways that matter. You. Will. Be. Blessed!

Finally, these blessings listed in today's magnificent gospel are ours in this life, not in some airy-fairy future. They are all in the present tense. This is how we are filled with a profound joy, that no person or circumstance can take away.

They are a mark of those who have truly surrendered to the King of Kings and have known and tasted his grace. Let me pray ...