

Beatitudes...

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Preacher: Donald Mackinnon

[0 : 00] Good morning. It's lovely to be back in Carlyway. It would be nice to say sunny Carlyway, but I'm not sure you can say that about many places in the islands these days.

We're going to be singing to God's praise from Psalm 147 in the Scottish Salter. All our praise this morning will be from the Scottish Salter.

So Psalm 147 and we'll sing verses 2 to 7. God doth build up Jerusalem, and he it is alone that the dispersed of Israel doth gather into one.

And then these beautiful words, those that are broken in their heart and grieved in their minds, he healeth, and their painful wounds he tenderly abides.

Psalm 147 verses 2 to 7. God doth build up Jerusalem, and he it is alone.

[1 : 11] God doth build up Jerusalem, and he it is alone that the dispersed of Israel doth gather into one.

Those that are broken in their heart and grieved in their minds, he healeth, and their painful wounds he tenderly abides.

He guides the number of the stars, he names them everyone.

Great is our Lord, and all we bow, His wisdom, search, and love.

The Lord lifts up the beam and casts the wigs to the ground, sing to the Lord and give him thanks.

[3 : 06] On our blessed praises, Lord. Let us bow our heads and throw near to God in prayer. Let us pray.

Eternal and sovereign Father in heaven, we come before thee this morning as thy grace-dependent children here on earth.

And for all the years and time we may accrue on this earth, we never rise above that sense of having a childlike dependence upon thee with the consciousness of our need of thee at all times.

And we bless thee for the desire that we exercised this morning, the desire that is not in any by nature, but the desire that we have to come before thee, to come aside, to come into the sanctuary that there we might seek and know thee, and know the blessing and fullness of communion and fellowship with thee.

The psalmist reminds us that a new song was put into his mouth, and here we have concluded an opening item of praise with the word sing to the Lord and give him thanks, and we seek to do that for thy people are a people who have every reason to sing to thee for all that they art unto them and to give thanks, to give thanks that even before this world existed, there was the provision made for sinners to have a standing hope in this life through the finished work of Christ.

[5 : 24] And so we come to thank thee for our salvation, to thank thee for the provision of thy love, to thank thee for his finished work, to thank thee for the blessing of that finished work, to thank thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, taking the salvation which had been appointed in the councils of eternity, accomplished in time by the Saviour and applied in our lives by the Spirit.

And we pray that we would strive and seek to know that fullness of life that is found when the sinner is reconciled to thee through the finished work of Christ and indwelt with a spirit of thankfulness.

We thank thee for thy day as we have it here in our island, a day where it is still recognized as a day separate and apart from the other days of the week, and we pray, O Lord, that that would continue and be maintained, and we thank thee that we are able to come aside.

We do so to worship, and we are before thee ever conscious that thou art the one whose knowledge of each and every one of us is perfect and complete, that there is no hiding place, that even our every thought to thee is known, our every word, our every action, our every motive.

And we bless thee for the revelation thou has made of thyself as a God's delight is in mercy and multiplied pardon. And we come, O Lord, now and seek for this time of worship, that thou would

separate us from everything that may be pressing heavy upon our minds individually and collectively, and that we might know that sense of being raised above even the things of time and sense to reflect on thee, on thy teaching and on thy truth.

[7 : 39] And we pray for the eliminating power of thy spirit. We remember before thee at this time those who mourn, as we have just heard, that the voice of death speaks once more in this community.

And we pray for the wisdom to hear that voice as it speaks to us in possession of life, reminding us that we also must pass this way, that here we have no continuing city.

And thou art the God who has revealed that thou dost have no pleasure in those who reject thee, but rather our desires that all would come to know the fullness of salvation in Christ.

We pray that they would be with those then who mourn, and that they would minister to them in that way that is singularly thine own, having that access into the recesses of the heart wherein they are able to communicate blessings of comfort and consolation.

And others we know across our island at this time who also mourn. And we remember, O Lord, also extending our thoughts this morning to the community in Southport, and the awfulness of all that unfolded when evil visited a dance class and brought such devastation, death and destruction.

[9 : 18] And to all that darkness, O Lord, we pray that they would minister peace and comfort in the way that thou alone art able, and that they would remember them, and give a hearing ear to the many prayers that will ascend into thine ear at presence, have ascended and will continue to ascend for lives that are shattered beyond our understanding or imagination.

Lord God, minister to them in the way that we have sung of this morning, that thou art the God who draws near to those that are grieved in their minds and broken in their hearts, and minister all out of thy fullness.

We pray that thou would continue with us, remember thy servant over this congregation, for whom we give thanks, for his service to this congregation, and for all that he means to us as a presbytery, for his input and his commitment, and for his encouragement to us.

And we pray now, O Lord, that thou would draw near to us here as we seek to draw near to thee, that they would hear us and help us and love us freely for Christ's sake. Amen.

Well, it's well known to some people in this congregation that preaching for me is a huge struggle.

And if preaching is a huge struggle, I don't know why, but our children's address is a bigger one.

[10 : 54] But I've been asked to do our children's address, and so I want to tell you today, and we're going back here probably 60, 70 years, a story about two little boys.

They lived in rural Perthshire, and they lived on adjoining farms, big, big, big farms, lots of fields. They both had lots of sisters, but no brothers.

And because of that, as you can imagine, they became great, great friends. Every morning on the weekends and every evening after school, school clothes off, jeans on, wellies on, and off out to play. And they played, as you can imagine, having a great, great time and everything that there was to do.

One morning they got up, and there had been a huge fall of snow. Whole farm and all the fields were covered in snow. So they set off, decided to play in the snow, and they came to this field, big, big field.

One side of the field was a row of trees, and the field was just pure white. Deep snow right up the top of the wellies, completely unbroken, and they just sat and they looked at it and they said, wow, it's not a beautiful sight.

[12 : 13] Then one of them said, what about if we play a game? What about if we each pick a tree and then see who can walk the straightest line across the field to the tree?

So they said, okay. One boy said, well, I'm going for this tree. And the other boy looked and said, well, I'm going to go for that one. Right, three, two, one, go. And off they went, walking, walking, walking, and after a wee while they reached the tree.

First boy turned round and he looked. Oh dear, whose path started out straight, but then it went that way about, and then, and it almost came back and then back, and it was all over the place.

And then he looked at the other boy, perfect straight line. Wellie, wellie, wellie, wellie, wellie, wellie, perfect straight line.

And the boy who had walked the straight line said to the boy who had walked, what do you do?

Well, he says, I tried, but he says, I kept looking back to see how I was doing.

[13:30] But he didn't realize, of course, and looking back that he was taking his eye off the target and he was walking all over the place. And so he said to the other boy, what did you do? He says, I looked at the tree and I kept my eye on that tree and I walked looking and I never took my eye off at all.

And in that way, he had walked a perfect straight line. So what's the application of that? Well, in many ways, each of you here today in possession of the gift of a young life, you are the two boys. The field is your life and the tree that you're to keep your eye on is Jesus. And how I wish I was the young boy who was standing on that side of the field because I don't know what my path looks like, but I know it's a very, very, very squint one. It's all over the place.

And how I wish I had walked and how I wish I had listened to those who, when I was standing about to step into the field, said to me, keep your eye on Jesus. I didn't.

But I do make my appeal to you. You have your Bible. You have it now in ways that we didn't have it.

[15:03] We have the old authorized version of the Bible, much harder to understand, much harder to retain, remarkably, we did read your Bible, learn about Jesus.

And as you cross that field, that is your life, keep your eye on Jesus and keeping your eye on Jesus.

His promise to you is he will never leave you. He will never forsake you. He will take you by the hand. He will lead you. I'm not promising you a smooth life, but I am promising you a fullness of life that you can only find walking with Jesus.

And so I hope and pray that as you look back across the field, you will see what it was for you to have walked across that field, looking to Jesus. It's what Jesus says to us so often in the Bible to every one of us.

Look ye unto me. All ye ends of the world and be ye saved. And may we know the blessing and the fullness of that.

[16:24] Okay. At this point, I think the children go out today. I'll just take a minute.

We are now going to read from God's Word from the Old Testament. First of all, from the prophecy of Isaiah and chapter 57.

And we're going to read verses 14 to 21. If you're using a Bible, a few Bible, you will see that this passage of scripture as a heading, comfort for the contrite.

So Isaiah 57 chapter 14, and it shall be said, Build up, build up, prepare the way, Remove every obstruct obstruction from my people's way.

For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, Who inhabits eternity, Whose name is holy.

[17:29] I dwell in the high and lofty and holy place, And also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, To revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry, For the spirit would grow faint before me, And the breath of life that I made.

Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain, I was angry. I struck him. I hid my face and was angry. But he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.

I have seen his ways, but I will heal him. I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, Creating the fruit of the lips.

Peace, peace to the far and to the near, says the Lord, And I will heal him. But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet. And his waters toss up mire and dirt.

[18:32] There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked. And then turning to the New Testament, to the Gospel of Matthew, And chapter 5, unless you'll see on the screen we're reading verses 1 to 11.

Seeing the crowds he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, His disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you, And that there are all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[19 : 57] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. And so on, and may God bless to us these readings from His holy word.

We're continuing singing to God's praise, and this time from Psalm 19, and we're going to sing the verses from verse 9 to verse 13.

Psalm 19, unspotted is the fear of God, and death endure forever. The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

They more than gold, ye much fine gold, to be desiled are, And honey, honey from the comb, that droppeth, sweet are far. And so on, down to the end of the verse Mark 13, to God's praise from Psalm 19, unspotted is the fear of God.

Unspotted is the fear of God, and death endure forever.

[21 : 13] The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

They more than gold, ye much fine gold, to be desiled are, And honey, honey from the comb, that droppeth, sweet are far.

But over the life's serve and war, heaviest life should frame.

A great reward provided is for them not keep the sin.

Who can this error understand, O cleanse thy me with it?

[22 : 47] From sin red false, thy servant ye, from a risen fiasin.

And do not suffer them to ha' dominion over me, Than righteous as the innocent I promise it shall be.

Can we then for a time this morning turn to the second passage of scripture we read, Matthew chapter 5, and we'll read from the beginning of the chapter.

Seeing the crowds he went up on the mountain, and when he, that is Jesus, sat, taught him saying, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. And so on.

[24 : 34] Do you know of any of you have ever been in a professional jeweler shop? Probably more applicable to the girls than the boys. I thought the boys have to go there at certain times in their life as well.

And if you recall that, when you go into a professional jeweler shop, the jeweler will often take out a black cloth, and he lay it on the counter.

Because if you're purchasing a diamond ring, or you're looking at diamonds, he wants to show the beauty of the diamond.

He might be serving you over a glass-topped counter where all the trays of the diamond rings are, but you don't see the beauty of the diamond ring.

When he lays it on top of the glass case, he'll put his black cloth out, and it really, really, really brings out the beauty of the diamond.

[25 : 37] And I spoke about this a couple of weeks ago in another congregation, and there were people who said afterwards, Yeah, I actually saw that when I went to buy my wedding ring, and that's what they did.

They took out a black cloth, and there were selection of rings we looked at, and it really brought out the beauty of the diamonds. The passage of Scripture we're looking at today, in many ways, has a comparison to that.

Because here we're reading what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. And within the Sermon on the Mount, we have these sayings, with which Jesus began his Sermon that day.

What we call the Beatitudes. If you listen to the American preacher, Steve Lawson, in his own American way, his view is there are attitudes that are to be in you.

So perhaps that's one way to remember the Beatitudes. That's just Steve Lawson's way. But the background, the dark background is what I want to focus on first of all, because this was a dark day.

[26 : 54] And unless we familiarize ourselves with just the darkness of the day, we will fail necessarily to see the beauty that is brought out in the teaching here.

So what was the day? Well, first of all, it was a day of spiritual darkness, a day of spiritual deadness, and a day of false religion.

There is a text at the end of the book in Judges, where there are the very last day of very, very deep spiritual darkness, and the very last verse in the book of Judges says this, and men did that which was right in their own eyes.

I don't know that there's ever been a generation or a time when that text cannot be applied. It can certainly be applied to our own day. Everybody doing what is right in their own eyes.

But it was through in the day that we are looking at here, the day when Christ began his own ministry.

[28 : 16] And perhaps the greatest part of that darkness was the men who were doing what was right in their own eyes, the Pharisees, because they were preaching and teaching a false religion.

And into all of that, we now have Christ. And Christ, as we are told in the previous chapter at verse 17, these words, from that time Jesus began to preach.

So the previous chapter, we have now this announcement that would have gone far and wide throughout the land.

And the message, one word, repent. Why? Because the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And in verse 17, from that time Jesus began to preach, saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[29 : 32] And now we can begin with that as our backdrop and our background to look here, because Christ here is now beginning to teach us about the kingdom of heaven.

And here for us in the very first beatitude, blessed are the poor in spirit. And what are they blessed with?

The kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the poor in spirit. And so the sermon on the mount begins and focuses on two particular aspects of the kingdom of heaven.

The characteristics and the conduct. The characteristics, first of all, of those who will be in the kingdom of heaven.

And he sets out for us in the beatitudes, what are the characteristics or the marks of the people who will be in the kingdom of heaven.

[30 : 52] He's not telling us here how to become a person who is in the kingdom of heaven. He's telling us here what is true about those who are Christians, who are in the kingdom of heaven.

The beatitudes is not something that we're to go away and practice in order that we become those who are in the kingdom of heaven. The beatitudes teach us what is true about those who have had that change in their life.

The characteristics and the conduct. Which of the beatitudes with this word? Blessed.

And the obvious question that that raises is, well, what does that mean? Because it's repeated all the way down. Every beatitude begins. Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed.

Many of you, I'm sure, will have heard the teaching on blessed. It means to be happy. But I want to go a step back from that.

[32 : 01] Because when we think of the beatitudes and when we think of this word blessed, the first thing I think we need to understand and remind ourselves is that every person who is blessed is a recipient of grace.

What is grace then? Grace is the unmerited favour of God.

We have grace and we have mercy. The easy way to remember them. Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve.

And mercy is keeping from us what we do. And so, as we are thinking at the outset of the beatitudes, they begin with this word, blessed.

God giving us what we do not deserve. And the characteristics of those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven begin with grace.

[33 : 13] Because characteristics of grace need to be lodged in hearts of grace if they're going to produce lives of grace.

In that way, the blessed are happy. And as Jesus began teaching then the characteristics, He begins with this word, blessed.

They're blessed with grace. The grace is lodged in their hearts. Lodged in their hearts, it begins to outwork. Grace is active.

Grace is not passive. Grace is active. It works out. It works out in our lives. And then we see from each of the beatitudes that we have a blessing and we have a promise.

So, we have the blessing, the first one, the poor in spirit, the promise. There's just the Kingdom of Heaven. I wonder how we would all have felt if we had all been there that day.

[34 : 26] Blessed are the poor in spirit. Is that the way you would have expected the sermon on the Mount to begin? Is that the way you would have thought of it, those who are going to be in heaven?

Is that the way I think I would have expected? Blessed are the faithful. Blessed are the obedient. Blessed are those who are shining lights for me.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Is that really the way you would have thought the sermon on the Mount would begin? And yet, there it is for you. And the characteristic.

So, we have the blessing and the promises. And between the blessing and the promises, we have the characteristic of each blessing. We have the poor, we have those who mourn, those who meek, those who hunger and thirst, and then the promise.

And so Christ begins to teach and to preach the Kingdom of Heaven. Repent. Who is going to be in the Kingdom of Heaven? The poor in spirit.

[35 : 33] And we have these beatitudes as they go on. Some say there's eight, some say there's more. I'm going to go just now for eight. We won't fall out about it. But they are there.

And a very, very, very important, and it's probably the most important point I'm going to make this morning is this. Never, ever, ever separate the beatitudes.

And I would discourage you from thinking of them as steps. I've heard it and I don't agree with it.

And if that rubs people up the wrong way, then I'm sorry.

I'll explain why I don't agree with that. If you think of eight steps, then you go obviously on step one.

By the time you're step four, you're not in step one.

You're on step four. At step eight, you're way above the others. Think of them instead as a chain made up of eight links.

[36 : 39] They are joined together. The reason for that, because as long as the Lord leaves you in this world to be a witness to the grace that is in dwelling you, you will always be pure in spirit.

You will never rise above that. You'll never step above that. You'll never, ever, step above morning. You'll never, ever, step above being meek.

You'll never, ever, step above hungry and thirsty. They're not steps. They are all inextricably linked together. Like a chain, each one of them.

And we need to understand the beatitudes in that way. If we don't, then I think we are going to become skewed in our understanding of what Christ was teaching here.

Yes, He identifies them as individual characteristics, but they're all joined together. They are the marks. They are the marks.

[37 : 53] And as we see, hopefully as we go on, we'll see. So, let's start looking at the beatitudes. We're not going to go through them all. But we are going to get through the foundation of them, which I think we'll see how they form in our life.

And so we're told, there in verse three, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven.

That would not have been language. That would have been strange to those who sat on that mount that morning. That would not have been something that they had never heard of.

They would not have sat there and said, poor in spirit. Jesus is preaching poor in spirit. These were people who were familiar, at least if not well versed in the teachings of the Old Testament.

They knew their Old Testament well. And from the very book that we read, Isaiah 57, which I'll come back to, further on, in chapter 61, it begins this way.

[39 : 19] It's a text that further on from this passage, Christ was one day as we are. Where was he on the Sabbath day?

He was in the synagogue. He was in church. And they handed him the Bible and he read. Where did he read from? He went back to the Old Testament. What did he read? The prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 61.

So what does Isaiah 61 say? The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

So they had that Old Testament teaching and I believe many of them that would immediately have triggered a thought. Okay, Isaiah taught us that the spirit of the Lord would be upon a man. That man would come and he would preach good news to the poor. The last time we were together a few weeks ago, we were thinking of this, the good news.

[40 : 32] And if you were here then, you'll recall what I said. The good news is only good news to those who know the bad news.

The illustration I gave then, if this week the media outlets run a story whereby a breakthrough has been made in medical science and there is now a medical procedure that is going to bring relief and healing to people with a certain condition.

We will all say, well it's in that great news. All these people who have been afflicted in this way are now going to be able to get this new medical breakthrough that's going to bring such healing and comfort and restoration to their lives.

We would all say that's great news. But really, it's great news for those who have the condition.

It's these people that are really, really going to say this is amazing news. And so before we come to receive the good news, we need to understand the bad news about ourselves.

[41 : 52] What is the bad news about ourselves? Well you may have heard the illustration before of a story, a true story about a little girl who came to be known as the Highland Kitchen maid.

This is going back probably somewhere in the region of 200 years and more. And the story is about a minister from the Black Isle who was making his way to the General Assembly in Edinburgh which consisted of a journey of about 10 days and he made his way and each night he would stop at an inn.

And on this particular night he stopped at this inn, he had stayed there before many times. And as was custom in these places, at the end of the day in these inns, they would have family worship. Oh that we would see it again. And so he went there and the lady who ran the inn asked him and said can you come down and take family worship and he went down and she called all the staff and everybody was there.

And he looked up and he said to her is everybody here? And he said well yes, apart from the little girl who works in the kitchen, it was called the scullery in these days. Some of you may remember that word.

[43 : 09] I remember it being used in my own time when I was growing up. But she was the little kitchen maid. And so he said well we won't start as she's brought in and he looked and they brought her in.

And he couldn't get over how dishevelled and scruffy looking she was. But yet when she sat down there was something that deeply intrigued him.

Worship was complete and he went over and he sat down beside her. He began talking to her. And he found her to be profoundly spiritually ignorant.

He said to her how is it with your soul? And she said what's a soul? And so for the next hour he began speaking to her about the teachings of scripture.

The very basics. And he left her and he said to her I'm going away to Edinburgh and I want you to do something for me. I want you to pray a prayer. There's only four words but I want you to pray this prayer.

[44 : 17] And I am going to buy you a little gift and I'll take it back and I'll give you the gift when I came back. Here's the prayer. Show me myself.

And he left her. He went off to Edinburgh before turning to head home. He went into a little chief and on the top left a beautiful little white linen handkerchief.

And on the top left hand corner there was hand embroidered a bouquet of flowers. And he thought she loved that. And he went back and as previous time came for evening worship and he called for everybody to come.

And again the little girl was missing so he turned to the lady who ran the inn and said to her where the little kitchen made. And she said not many days after you left here that girl became very, very, very deeply troubled and cast down.

Unable to do her work we've got her on a mattress under the main staircase just now. So he conducted worship and afterwards he went to the little girl and he said to her how are you?

[45 : 44] And she said I wish I had never, ever, ever prayed these words because your prayer and these words have been answered.

My understanding has been open to see what a dreadful person I am. I never realised that all the days of my life I have been sinning against God.

It's just never, ever, ever and now I am in deep conviction of the truth about myself. And he sat with her and he ministered to her out of the depths of his compassion and all pastoral ability.

And he said to her I'm giving you this and I want you to continue the prayer of four words but you'll change one word.

You'll change one word. Now show me thy self. This is a true story because years and years and years later back in the black Isle, he wasn't a married minister.

[47 : 03] He had a housekeeper and the housekeeper came to him and said there's a lady at the door who wants to speak to you and wants to see you. And he said to the housekeeper who is she? And he said I don't know she's not anybody from the congregation.

And so this lady came in and under her arm she had a large brown parcel. And she opened it and there was a beautiful set of embroidered linen tablecloth and placemats and so on.

And she explained to him that she was the little girl who he had left saying show me thy self.

And the fullness of joy that she spoke of when light and grace flooded into her life as she came to receive the good news.

And for that, that little girl for me is the epitome of what it is to be poor in spirit. The work of grace begins in a life with the purpose of bringing you to Jesus.

[48 : 29] But before grace brings you to himself, it has to bring you to yourself. And when it brings you to yourself, then you will understand what it is to be poor in spirit.

Poor in spirit empties us of ourselves. If we come with something, we will receive nothing.

Talking to one of the elders in Stornoway a couple of months ago. And he was telling me about the first night he went to the prayer meeting in Stornoway full of all the anxiety that men here have gone to the prayer meeting for the first time can understand.

And he said you know, I'll never forget that first night in the prayer meeting. And he named this elder who was put up to pray. He'd had a really, really, really tough time in the Second World War being called up at the beginning and having gone through it and seen and suffered and experienced all the horrors of war.

And he was a very godly and a very gracious man. And he was called up in prayer. And this elder was telling me that about that night.

[49 : 50] Early 70s. And here's this old man called up in prayer. And this is how he began. Lord, I am nothing.

And nothing is nothing. What a way to begin a prayer. I'm not sure of that would go down to if I had begun today praying. Lord, I am nothing.

And nothing is nothing. But that is what it is to be poor in spirit. We've all sung it. We've all heard it.

What's the words? Nothing in my hands I bring. That is poor in spirit. Who are the poor in spirit?

The people that have been brought to see the truth about themselves. The fact that as they come, they come in all their emptiness.

[50 : 47] And yet, remember what Jesus says as he begins to expound. Who is going to be in heaven?

Who is going to be there? The faithful? The obedient? Those that can hold up and say, I've done this, this, this, this, this. No, the poor in spirit.

And so we move on. From being poor in spirit, Jesus then moves on to the next of his blessednesses.

Blessed are those who mourn. And again, we need to understand that here, we are looking at the spiritual aspect of mourning.

There is physical mourning and there is spiritual mourning. Praise be to God that there is provision made for us in physical mourning.

[51 : 50] We sing of that in Psalm 23. Every time we have a funeral service, often we'll sing Psalm 23. The promise for us there that he is with us in death's dark veil.

And we thank God for that. And for those of us that have experienced loss. And for everything by way of strength and comfort and compassion and consolation that we have experienced from the hand of God as we go through that excruciatingly difficult experience.

Yes, but here we are reflecting on, remember the links, the poor in spirit. Why are they poor in spirit?

Because they've come to realize this. They are sinners. And so they are mourning for sin. They are mourning, mourning both for internal sin and external sin. I'm going to focus first of all on the internal.

[53 : 02] They are mourning for their internal sin. How did Christ begin His ministry? Remember the word? Repent.

What is repentance? Repentance is a saving grace. This word grace keeps following us as we're walking our way through this.

It's a saving grace whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and outwardly reformed.

A saving grace whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled, you are humbled because of your sin.

Perhaps I'll repeat the Catechism.

Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, death with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God with full purpose of an endeavor after new obedience.

[54 : 24] That is the repentance. That is the turning. That is the effect of grace when grace comes in and illuminates you to the truth about yourself.

I now understand that all the days of my life, sin has been present every single day of my life.

I have been sinning against God. I am going to stand before Him one day and give an account for that. And now this grace has come into me.

It's worked in me. This revelation of who I am and what I am. But it has also shown me that there is mercy in God in Christ.

And so I want to turn from my sin. So why? If repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby you turn from your sin unto God.

[55 : 28] Well I could ask any of the members in the congregation here to come and stand and say to them, for two minutes tell us about sin in your life.

Perhaps begin first of all by telling us how long you've been following the Lord, how long you've been a Christian. Tell us about the sin in your life.

The psalmist told us, we sang it, for him, his own life was a mystery.

Who can his errors understand? His own life was a mystery to him. He knew that there was error in his life, but he couldn't understand it.

And that corresponds with the well-known teaching that we have where the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 7 what is often referred to as the believer's riddle.

[56 : 33] It is only the believer that can understand what Paul speaks about in Romans 7. So what does Paul say in Romans 7?

When I would do good, evil is present with me. Now it's important for us to just pause there for a minute.

Paul, are you conscious of evil all the time? No. When I would do good he says. So take that away with you and just see how much of that you'll see in your own life.

When you would do good, evil is present with you. So Paul, what happens? Well, I want to do good, but that's not what I do.

I don't do what is good, I do what is wrong. In fact, he says, the good that I would, I do not. That that I hate, I do.

[57 : 39] And for that, it will ever remain a riddle to those who don't know that by experience. But because of the power of the indwelling remaining corruption that is in the life of those who are poor in spirit, who have been made the recipients of saving grace, there are people who know what it is to mourn.

When we come to Christ, we are encouraged to become members in a congregation. And when we do that, we do so by making a public profession of our faith.

Think of it this way. Think of that day for those of you who have made that public profession of faith.

Think of the unstained garment that you were clothed with that day, the profession of your faith.

It's not unstained now, is it? It's not unstained now. It's that image that's brought before us in the book of Zechariah, where he sees Joshua the High Priest standing before God, and we're told clothed in filthy garments.

We've stained our profession of faith. I've stained mine, and worried to be known, I would be escorted out of here and charged never to come back.

[59 : 16] But I know that there is not a person in here who has not sinned against light and sinned against knowledge. And for these things, we need to understand that that is something that is not abnormal in the lives of those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Very often, it's a great, great challenge, and a struggle to those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven, because they see the depth and the extent of this sin and how it manifests itself in their lives.

And so for those who have made that profession of faith, for those who have been the recipients of grace, there is no difficulty whatsoever for them to understand what it means here.

Blessed are those who mourn. So is this a defeated life? Is this what's been spoken of here? Is everything that I've said talking a kind of defeated life?

That's not the way Christ taught it. Yes, you will mourn, but I'm going to comfort you. How does he comfort us? Go back to the night he was betrayed.

[60 : 43] He's teaching to the disciples. I'm going away. Broken-hearted, but I'm going to send a comforter. A comforter.

And how will that comfort? Well, for the disciples, they were broken-hearted, because Christ had been with them. But when he left them, he came to be in them.

Isn't that the incredible words that we read in Isaiah 57? I think these are some of the most amazing words that we can read.

Some of you may recall a communion preparatory service that was preached in this very congregation, in this very spot by the late Professor Donald MacLeod on these words. Thus sayeth the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity.

What I thought that is. That's God speaking. Thus sayeth the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity.

[61 : 49] Whose name is holy? He tells us his name. Whose name is holy? And we say to holy, where do you live? I dwell in the high and lofty places.

Completely outside the concept and understanding of the most gifted mind that has ever been on the face of this earth.

Finite understanding cannot even begin to grasp the teaching of that, the height of that. Thus sayeth the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity. I dwell in the high and lofty places.

And then with him also, that is of a contrite and a humble spirit. The poor in spirit, the mourning in spirit.

And what's true about them? God is in dwelling in them. After the service go back and read Isaiah 57-15 and grasp the enormity of that.

[63 : 05] The enormity of that. This is not a defeated life. This is the most enriched life you can ever have. You're on your way to the kingdom of heaven.

Yes, you're poor in spirit. Yes, you mourn. But in dwelling you. It's the God who made all of that. He's in dwelling you. He's there. It's not a defeated life. No wonder people want to say happy. This is happiness. Happy are the poor in spirit. Happy are those who mourn. For they shall be comforted. Happy are the meek.

Who are the meek? The opposite of arrogant. It's a definition I read this week. And I looked at many definitions and I think that is an excellent way to think of meekness.

[64 : 12] It's not people who are arrogant. And Sinclair Ferguson has this fantastic. As only Sinclair Ferguson's mind can have this fantastic definition of meekness.

Meekness, he says, is a spirit of patient submission and humility before all providences produced by a renouncing of all personal rights and manifesting itself in a spirit of gentleness.

Who do you see that in? In perfection. In the provision of God's love who came from heaven.

How remarkable it is that of all the attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ, he wanted to draw attention to one.

Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden. For I am meek and lowly and hard.

[65 : 22] How interesting is that? The meekness of Christ. Let me read Sinclair Ferguson's definition of it again. Think of it as applicable to Christ. Meekness, a spirit of patient submission and humility before all providences produced by a renouncing of all personal rights and manifesting itself in a spirit of gentleness.

By a renouncing of all personal rights, he came from the highest to the lowest and manifesting itself in a spirit of gentleness.

The beatitudes go on and as I say time has gone and I didn't get what I was wanting to get to. But the beatitudes go on and from there on they become not so much with negative thoughts but very positive.

What is outward in those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are the meek? So you've spoken about all this that goes on inside them. What's the effect of that?

They hunger and they thirst after righteousness. What does that mean? They want to be right with God. Yes they're aware of the fact that they're poor in spirit.

[66 : 43] Yes they mourn because of their sin but they hate their sin and they want to get away from their sin. And they want to get right with God. It's speaking of sanctification.

Why are you here today? You've got to hunger, you've got to thirst. Those lives where grace does that work, it changes your desire, it changes your way of thinking.

Some time ago I was at a communion weekend and an old man asked everybody, a man who had been following for a long time, how do I know of him a Christian? And there were a lot of people in the room.

And one person said, desire. What does it say about Christ? There was no beauty in him that we should desire him.

What is he to you today if you know what it is to be poor in spirit, to be mournful, to be meek, to be emptied of self? You have a desire, you have a desire for Christ.

[67 : 59] Well, I want to close with something that comes from a book of prayers that was written from the prayers of the Puritans. And it really is something I picked up last night and I thought, well, there's so much in this that is applicable to what we've been looking at today.

So a book of prayers and the book is called The Valley of Vision. You can buy it in the banner of truth. It's written in old Puritan language, but it has some really, really beautiful thoughts and you can see the way these Puritans were illuminated in their minds.

Let me give you a quick flavour of it and with this we're going to close. The Valley of Vision. Lord High and Holy, Meek and Lowly, Thou hast brought me to the Valley of Vision. The Puritan imagined his life to be one walking through a valley.

The mountains were his sin. The mountains were his failings. The mountains were his shortcoming. We have it in the Son of Solomon, the mountains of Bethel.

Thou hast brought me to the Valley of Vision, where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights. Emden by mountains of sin, I behold thy glory.

[69 : 17] And then listen to these beautiful thoughts. Let me learn that the broken heart is the healed heart. That the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit.

That the repenting soul is the victorious soul. That to have nothing is to possess all. That to bear the cross is to wear the crown.

That the valley is the place of vision. And he concludes with these words. Let me find thy light in my darkness, thy life in my death, thy joy in my sorrow, thy riches in my poverty, thy grace in my sin, thy glory in my valley.

That's powerhead. Sovereign Father in Heaven, we do give thanks unto thee for the provision that was made for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we bless thee for the blessings with which he opened his earthly ministry. And on a mountain with a great multitude before them began saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[70 : 49] As we are found here together before thee and under thy truth, we pray that there would be another day where we would be found together in the kingdom of heaven, giving praise unto thee that so pure in spirit, so having occasion to mourn, so being brought into the depths of make-ness, that these things were no barrier to the exercise of thy free grace in our lives.

And the praise shall be thine forever in Christ. Amen. We'll conclude singing at this time from Psalm 86 and at verse 10.

There is a verse in this Psalm and I'm quite happy to share with you. It's a verse I pray every day because I see the need of it every day.

Teach me thy way and in thy truth, O Lord, then walk will I. I need to be taught. I need to be taught his way.

I need to be in the truth and I need to be taught the truth so that I will walk, so that I will fulfill the desire. I am conscious that so often I do walk but it's with a divided heart.

[72 : 23] And the psalmist was conscious of that as well. Otherwise, why did he pray? Unite my heart. Because when the heart is united, it is a single purpose for which Christ praised Mary.

Mary, you have chosen the one thing needful. When we choose the one thing needful, it unites the heart. There is the continual fear of the name outward in our lives.

Let's sing to God's praise from Psalm 86 from verse 10 to verse 13.

I pledge our to be admired, and love, our God, thyself alone.

Teach me thy way and in thy truth, O Lord, then walk will I.

[73 : 57] Unite my heart. God I, thy name, may fear continually.

O Lord, my God, with all my heart to thee I will give praise.

Unite the glory well as kind unto thy name always.

Because thy mercy toward me and greatness doth excel.

And thou deliverest my soul out from the lowest hell.

[75 : 27] We conclude the word of prayer. Sovereign Father in heaven, we do give thanks unto thee for the inestimable privilege renewed in our experience of being in the courts of thy house.

To know what it is to have communion and fellowship with thee. And we pray now, Lord, as we continue in the blessing of thy day, that we would know that continued nearness and blessing that comes from thyself.

That the redeeming of her time would be to thy praise and honor and glory. And that thou would be with the congregation here as they resume public worship and thy servant who will lead them this evening.

May they have the consciousness of the burning heart and of thyself in the midst. And all we ask in the Precious Name of Christ, amen.