

Christian Living 101

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[0 : 0 0] Well then folks, turn back with me for a few moments this morning to Matthew chapter 5 and the sermon on the Mount. We could start off by saying one of the greatest known passages of the Bible, but I guess the question that we could come up with is it? Is the sermon on the Mount really that well known by individuals, by congregations, by churches? Do we really know, comprehend and understand the teaching of Jesus as contained within these two chapters, chopped full of such practical advice? I'm not sure that we always do. One of you have ever heard the term 101. You may have used the term 101. People have often used it for a basic kind of knowledge. Bible reading 101. Traktor restoration 101. Anything that it may be. People have offered all kinds of complicated reasons why this 101 term is used, but I went looking and the reason this 101 term is used is because in most colleges throughout the world, apart from the UK, courses are contained in three digits. And the initial course, the basic course, the foundational course of any subject is termed using the numbers 101. So people then use 101 as a basic designation for things that happen. What we have in the sermon on the Mount is Christian living 101.

It's the basis of Christianity. It's what it means to be a Christian and it comes from the mouth of Jesus himself. The self-help books over the past number of years have skyrocketed if you look at sales figures because people yearn for success. People long for wholeness and togetherness and self-worth and achievement in their lives, you know the kind of thing.

You've seen them, I'm sure, 10 steps to successful living. Mindfulness, the gateway to completeness. Living in the moment, saying yes even when it's scary. These kind of airy fairy kind of books like that.

The full people's minds full of nonsense. It may be that we come to the Bible with that kind of expectation. We may come even to the sermon on the Mount this morning thinking, well this is really what Matthew's doing, is it not?

He's giving us some nice steps to a happier, more content together whole life. No. I'm going to brush your bubble.

[2 : 5 2] That's not what we have here. But what we have here in Matthew 5 is teaching from the Almighty, eternal God of Heaven. And what we have and what we're going to be looking at particularly this morning is these divinely revealed expectations, not suggestions, expectations from God.

And when we seek to fulfil or live up to these expectations with a faithful obedience, that is what will lead to a happier, fuller, more content together life.

And not just that but a life that enjoys the favour of God himself. But before we get to that, a couple of preliminary questions. Who is Jesus talking to?

It's always key when opening the Bible to look at context, to look at background, to get an idea of what has been spoken, where it's been spoken and why it's been spoken, even how it's been spoken.

And it's no different here as we look at the sermon on the Mount. Who is Jesus talking to here? Jesus has gone up on a hillside and he has sat down and he has begun to teach his people, his church.

[4 : 12] Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. This isn't the big crowds that had been following Jesus. This is his disciples, those who have followed him in a faith sense, those who have committed their lives to him, those who have come to sit under his teaching, they come to him.

They go up the hill with Jesus. He's talking to Palestinian peasants. He's talking to farmers, to fishermen. He's not just talking to his 12. Why?

Because he hasn't yet called all of the 12. He's called some of them. He hasn't called all of them. So his disciples meaning those who have followed him, it's bigger than just the 12. It is the church.

So here in the sermon on the Mount, he is talking to his church. He's talking to Christians. He's talking to you and I. Okay, so we see the setting is up on a hill and there is real imagery there, looking back to Moses who went up on a hill and who received teaching and Jesus was up on the hill and he gives teaching as God himself. We could preach on that all day, but that's not what we're here to do this morning.

So Jesus is up on the hill and he's speaking, he's teaching Christians. So this is relevant to you and I. And who is he describing then in the Beatitudes as he begins to open up the Beatitudes?

[5 : 42] Well, he says, blessed are those, who more? What does he mean by that? Does he mean just people who are believed, all people who are believed, just some people who are believed? We could ask that about virtually every Beatitude.

Well, first of all, the first thing to notice with the Beatitudes is look at the brackets. They're kind of bracketed in verse 3 and then in verse 10. And what are they bracketed with? They're bracketed with the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Verse 3, verse 10, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Who is Jesus describing here? Those who live in the Kingdom of Heaven. Who is it that live in the Kingdom of Heaven?

The Christian believer. Those who live under the Lordship, the rule and the reign of Jesus Christ. He's talking to you and I, if we are the Lord's people, this is specific teaching to us.

That might be perhaps not the way that we've looked at the Beatitudes previously. We may have looked at the Beatitudes as something for someone else. Teaching for those who are outside the Kingdom.

[6 : 54] Teaching for those who are struggling, those who are lost, those who are grieving. But that's not what Jesus says. That's not who Jesus is talking to. He's talking to his people. And he's encouraging them to live a life of faithful obedience.

The other thing to note is in a preliminary sense here with the Beatitudes is the word that is used again and again and again. Blessed. A covenantal word. A word that God uses again and again to his covenant community.

Jesus is describing those who are under his rule, those who are in his covenant community, you and I.

So within the Beatitudes, before we even come to them, we see that Jesus is speaking these things and they're recorded by Matthew. And in them he is giving us his divine expectations and they are addressed to his church and to individuals within his church.

Not just for someone out there, but for you and for I. When does this blessing come? Then we say, okay, he's talking about blessing. We see who he's writing to.

[8 : 11] We see he's talking about blessing, but when does this blessing come? Are these blessings for now? Are they for 2019? Or are these blessings for some future time when we are called into heaven?

Good question. You may have heard the term already, but not yet. That's how theologians would talk about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is something that is already, but not yet.

It's both and. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the great Welsh preacher said it is a kingdom which is to come. Yes, but it is also a kingdom which has come. The kingdom of God is among you and within you.

The kingdom of God is in every Christian. He reigns in the church when she truly acknowledges him. The kingdom has come. The kingdom is coming. The kingdom is yet to come.

And we should always bear that in mind. So we see that. Don't we? That the kingdom has already come. Jesus has come. Jesus has lived and Jesus has died. And Jesus has risen and Jesus has ascended and he has taken his place in the throne room of heaven.

[9 : 19] At the right hand of God, the Father has our intercessor as our advocate. The kingdom has come. But there is also a sense in which the kingdom is yet to come.

Because we have that great promise that Christ is coming, that he is coming back. And when he does, we shall experience a full realization of the kingdom of God and the restoration that God has already begun as noted for us in Ephesians 1.

So the Beatitudes are not just for a future time. They are not just for the kingdom of heaven. It is not just for when we enter eternity. But the Beatitudes are for today.

They are for right now. What does it say? If we are pure in heart, we will see God. That is for today. If we pursue purity, we will see God. Isn't that a great promise? A great thought.

And then how do we tackle the Beatitudes? You may be thinking, oh man, we have got a heading in for an 8-point sermon here today. And it is already quarter to 12. What on earth is going to happen?

[10 : 28] Well, may I allay your fears in that regard? We are not going to do an 8-point sermon here. But we are going to split the Beatitudes roughly into two groups. There is crossover, of course.

But the first four major Beatitudes focus on our relationship with God. And the second focus on our relationship with one another.

I wonder if you have ever noticed that. So here is a radical thought in the free church. How about a two-point sermon this morning with perhaps the longest introduction you have ever had? Nevertheless, two points. The Christian loving God and the Christian loving their neighbour.

Now, as you read the Beatitudes and you think about these two headings, what does it immediately remind you of? Well, people often look for a formula, don't they? There is no different for the Pharisees, Matthew 22, further on in this book.

Teacher, they said, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Trying to catch them out, of course. And Jesus replies, love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

[11 : 36] And the second is like it, love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. Isn't that really what we have presented for us in the Beatitudes? Those who love God and those who love one another.

So, first of all, the Christian loving God, both Matthew and Luke begin their summary of the Beatitudes with a reference to the poor. Now, a common thought, a common understanding of that would be, well, what Jesus is saying is, blest are those who are destitute, those who have nothing, those who are materially poor.

Is that what he's saying? There is a massive focus on the poor, the materially poor, those who are in abject poverty.

Is it right that the church seek to address that? Absolutely. We must have mercy ministry at our heart. However, Jesus is not speaking about the materially poor here. He's not speaking about those who live in poverty.

He's not speaking about those who cannot put food on the table. So often in Matthew's Gospel, when he references the poor, it's not somebody who is materially poor but somebody who is spiritually poor.

[12 : 57] When Matthew references the poor, it's usually somebody who's materially rich that he's referring to, name in the city. He calls them poor, but actually they are of some material wealth. So what is he on about? Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Who possesses the kingdom of heaven? The successful? The sure of themselves? The arrogant, the cocky, the religious, the legalist? No.

Those who are spiritually impoverished. The person who acknowledges their unworthiness in the face of a holy God.

The person who sees their own wretchedness and brokenness in the face of a just and righteous God. The Christian who sees their spiritual bankruptcy. That's the Christian.

The Christian is the one who is broken and contrite and penitent. They're the people. They're the ones who possess the kingdom of heaven. They're the ones who say, we could change this to say something like, blessed are those who realise that they have nothing within themselves to commend them to God. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[14 : 18] Isn't that good news this morning? Isn't it good news that as we come to a realisation of our brokenness and our inability and our unworthiness and our uncleanness, that it is then that we enjoy the favour of God. It is then that we see the beauty of Jesus. It is then that we come to a saving faith in ourselves, no but in Him. In Him.

The Beatitudes are different to sometimes what we expect. What is a person's greatest need? What is your greatest need this afternoon? Is your greatest need a new house or a new car or a new job? Is it a slimmer body? Is it a better haircut?

Is it a more force-right character? No. Your greatest need this afternoon is the forgiveness and redemption of your Creator God.

And that is yours through the shed blood of Jesus that ushers you into an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. What is your greatest need? Your greatest need is to be forgiven. Your greatest need is to recognise your poverty of spirit before God.

When we recognise our brokenness, unworthiness and cleanliness, we are blessed and we are blessed and ushered into His glorious kingdom. And we acknowledge the Saviour and trust in Him. I wonder, have you? Will you?

[16 : 11] Blessed are those who are poorness, but it is blessed to those who mourn for they will be comforted. Think of a minister who gets a call about a funeral. They think, oh, I'm going to have to do a funeral. What am I going to preach from at the funeral?

Maybe your mind is immediately drawn to this verse. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Good words, great text. But is that what Matthew means here? Is this the context of the verses?

Is it just a good text for a funeral for those who grieve the loss of a loved one? Well, again, no, it's not. Because this is less about grief and death than it is about grief over spiritual mourning, spiritual sorrow, coming to a knowledge of our brokenness and our unworthiness before a holy God leading to that mourning within us of the sin that remains.

You see how relevant this is to you and I as Christian believers, as we are more and more impressed by the weight of our sin and our brokenness and our unworthiness the longer we walk with Jesus and yet more and more aware of the wonder of the Gospel. There's that great tension, isn't there?

These aren't just isolated platitudes that Jesus is throwing out there. These aren't just nuggets of wisdom recorded by Matthew and put together into some kind of cohesive unit to pass on to future generations.

[17 : 39] This is a chain. This is progression. Stay with me. You'll love it by the time we get to the end. From an awareness of spiritual poverty, Jesus moves on to the sorrow that there is over that sin.

It goes from this confession of bankruptcy, the spiritual bankruptcy, now into what contrition over that sin? It's not grief of a loss of a loved one, but it's grief over the spiritual tatters in which we find ourselves.

That spiritual destitution, that spiritual grief, that spiritual mourning, it's so counterintuitive, isn't it? What Jesus is saying here is to the Christian, happy are you when you're sad?

You say that doesn't make sense. Happy are you, blessed are you when you're in pieces over your sin because then you will enjoy the favour of God, then you will enjoy the comfort of God, then you will enjoy the presence of God.

Maybe that's us this week. We've seen our sin. We've been impressed by our sin. We've felt the burden of our sin. We can't believe we've slipped up again, stumbling, faltering. We feel the weight of our sin, the offence of it towards God.

[18 : 58] Jesus says that's a good place to be because there you find the blessing of God. Now we come to a problem. We come to the word meek. Blessed are those who are meek for they shall inherit the earth.

Now in worldly terms, meekness is weakness. If a man is meek, then he is pathetic. If a man is weak, he is weak and he is feeble. But that's a far cry from what the Bible teaches, isn't it?

Because the Bible teaches that meekness is something to be cherished. That meekness is putting aside our own desires in favour of somebody else. That's meekness.

Meekness is not selfishly pursuing our own desires. And that's why it is to be prized. That's why it is a positive thing. We are to be meek toward one another. But that's not what he's saying here.

He says we're to be meek towards the Lord our God. To inherit the earth, we are to die to self.

[20 : 05] What is God's expectation? It's not that we are single-minded for what we desire, but it's that we yield to his word and to his will. That is biblical meekness.

We move on. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. What does that mean? It doesn't mean that we go out and fight social injustice.

That we seek righteousness in that way. What does he say? He's calling for holiness. Isn't that the nature of this beatitude? A craving for holiness. A longing for, a yearning for Christ likeness.

Isn't that what it is? To be a Christian. And Jesus promises that person who seeks holiness, who pursues it, satisfaction. What we yearn for. What we long for.

So everything up until this point is describing you as a Christian. Does it sound like Jesus is describing your life? Do you see your own spiritual poverty?

[21 : 18] Does your sin grieve you? Are you yielding to the will and the word of God? Is your first appetite for holiness to follow him? These are big questions, aren't they?

This is real teaching from Jesus. This is challenging the comfort perhaps which we have. This is a massive teaching, massive challenge in that for us.

By having focused on our relationship with God, as if Jesus pans now the camera around and says, now is the time to show the Christian loving their neighbour. There is symmetry here, isn't there? There's symmetry in the beatitudes that is a beauty to them.

If we want to be shown mercy by God, and don't we need that? Then there is symmetry. What are we to do? Then we are to show mercy to other people. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.

If we want to be favoured by God and experience his blessing, and he wants us to be generous, and our attitudes towards other people to be forgiving, to be merciful.

[22 : 35] If we struggle with that, the next one knocks us right to the floor, doesn't it? Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Blessed are the pure in heart. This idea of purity could be in relation to God, yes. But perhaps more challenging here is this purity in relation to our relationship with men and women, the people around about us.

It's so relevant to us today, isn't it? Because life is cheap. People are bought and sold even in 21st century western world that we live in.

There is still human trafficking, there is still slavery. There is still stuff that we tolerate now that we shouldn't. What disgusts you most about the society of which you live?

The immorality that is rampant, the ready availability of pornography, the acceptance of indecency.

[23 : 54] We are living in the age of the judges where there was no king and people did as they saw fit in their own eyes. What does Jesus say in Matthew 5? Not for you. Not you. There must be no place in your life for these things.

You must seek purity because if you find purity you will see God. What is the great lie of Satan? What is the great lie of sin? Just indulge yourself and you will find satisfaction, enjoyment and freedom.

You indulge yourself and you don't find these things. You indulge yourself further and further and further in the endless pursuit of the tail, like the dog chasing their tail the whole time.

Jesus says, no, there is something much greater. You may see God. If you are pure in heart, you pursue purity.

We are getting there. Two more. Verse 9, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. We must read this one every time, don't we? Have you misread it and misinterpreted it? Perhaps.

[25 : 02] What does verse 9 say? That we are to maintain peace, that we are to keep the peace? He doesn't say blessed are the peacekeepers. He says blessed are the peacemakers.

And there's a massive difference in that, isn't there? Just as the Father has made peace with us in Christ Jesus, if we are to be His children, if we are to be His church, if we are to take His name, then we are to be peacemakers.

It's not merely keeping the peace, but making peace. Making peace with those who have wronged you, making peace with family members who you have disagreements with.

We're not just to watch ourselves. We're not just to be peacemakers ourselves, but we're to teach our families, our children to be peacemakers. We're to make peace in the family, make peace in the home, make peace in the workplace.

We are to be peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness and for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[26 : 17] Jesus isn't just talking about those who are imprisoned for their faith, even as we heard of this morning in that prayer point from China. It's a much wider idea here, and that's why he expands the last beatitude into verses 11 and 12.

Not technically one of the beatitudes, but an expansion of the final one. He expands the idea of persecution. It's not just being locked up, but it's being insulted. It's being lied about. It's being mocked.

It's been misrepresented. It's been laughed about. It's been ridiculed in Jesus' name. And this is important because that kind of opposition, if you are a Christian, will come to you.

You will be mocked. You will be humiliated. You may be passed over for promotion. You may be pushed to the back of the line. You may experience these things. He's saying, don't let that surprise you.

They hated me first. There will be opposition if you follow Christ. But what does he promise here? He promises blessing even in these times.

[27 : 23] He promises blessing when you're laughed at for your faith. He promises the blessing when you're being shamed for your faith, maligned for your faith. Jesus promises blessing. What is more desirable?

The blessing of Jesus himself or the acceptance of an ignorant world. So where do we end? Well, we end right back at the beginning, don't we?

Christian Living 101. If you're not born again, if you're not a Christian, if you have not surrendered yourself to the Lordship of Christ, then you do not have access to any spiritual favour from God.

You do not have access to any of these blessings that we have spoken about this morning. But it needn't be that way. It needn't leave this place bereft of these blessings.

But you may accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and as your God. Have you recognised your brokenness, your sinfulness, your poverty of spirit?

[28 : 33] Does it grieve you? Does it mourn you? Are you willing to surrender your life to Him and yield your will to Him? Do you seek His righteousness?

Place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Speak to anyone here, they will tell you about Him and how He has saved them from their sin. Here's Jesus.

Up on a mountain site, teaching His people. But you know He came down from the mountain. And He ministered amongst the people before He ascended another hill, the hill of Calvary, where He was nailed to a cross and where He embodied every single one of these beatitudes.

He became spiritually poor. He became the man of sorrows and there was mourning in heaven. He acted with meekness and in mercy.

He focused all of His will upon the Father's will. He made peace for you and for me and it all happened through the persecution of His fellow man and even God as He bore our sin becoming sin for us.

[29 : 59] He was in the kingdom this afternoon. Or are you still on the outside? If you're looking for meaning togetherness, wholeness, fullness, satisfaction, then you'll not find it in a self-help book.

You'll not find it in the world. You'll not find it in any of the promises of Satan or temptation. But you'll find it in the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who has embodied all of these things and offers His blessing and His fullness and His kingdom to us.

The beatitudes are Christian living. 101. I wonder are you clothed with the righteousness of Christ? Don't leave this place today until you speak to Him.

Plesper. Father God, we thank you for the great blessing that is ours in Christ Jesus. We recognise our own poverty of spirit, the little that we have.

We recognise the sin and the wickedness that remains within our hearts. And yet we revel and we rejoice in the wonder of the gospel. That Jesus, the one who had no sin, was made to be sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

[31 : 14] We recognise that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We pray that each one would know Jesus as their Lord and their God this morning.

And that you would send us out into the world as those who embody the beatitudes. And that we would live upside down, that we would live counter-cultural lives for the glory of your name and for the building of your kingdom.

That's the gospel in Jesus' name.