

A few weeks back, I was working 90km South of Bollon, and the wireless in the truck was set on 585 2WEB... You know you're a long way from home when you start listening to the Bourke radio station... Anyway, there was some talk-back thing happening – I don't know who it was, but something after the vein of John Lawes or Allan Jones – you know the type of thing where whoever wants to, can ring up and say whatever they like, and over the course of a morning or afternoon, the presenter voices their opinions over and over again, with an appropriate level of indignation, on some current event that's taken place.

*And I can't remember what had happened, but there was something that involved some ethnic group, who'd fled their own country, made their new home in Australia, but now they were protesting violently in the streets, in **this** country, about things that they wanted to change here.*

And of course, the talk-back, and the talking head were all over it. And they'd probably say the same things as many of us would "If you want to live in this country, you live by the rules of this country." "If it's so good the way it is back at your home, well you go back there."

Australians do things the Australian way. We have our rules. We have our ways. We have our laws. And if you want to call the Commonwealth of Australia "Your home", you have to agree to live as an Australian.....

Well, this morning, I want you to consider what it means to live as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. You and I, are **not** just Australians – we're Christians. And as Christians, we belong, not so much any more to the Commonwealth of

Australia – We belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. And the Kingdom of Heaven has very different values to the country that we live in.

And just as there is an expectation that those who choose to call Australia home, will live by Australian values, there is an absolute necessity for those who take on the name of Christ – those who now belong to the Kingdom of Heaven, to live by Kingdom values.

Over the next few months, we're going to be working our way through the greatest sermon ever preached – the sermon on the mount. And this sermon, is a great manifesto on Kingdom living.

Today, we're just going to take the first 12 verses – the beatitudes, or as Billy Graham calls them, “the beautiful attitudesⁱ”. Because that's what they are. The beatitudes is where Jesus addresses our characterⁱⁱ – the attitude of our hearts - .

The first couple of verses, we often tend to just skip over, because we want to get to the guts of it. But, to the Jewish reader, these few verses are the **keys** to the guts of it. They're important.

You see, Jesus climbed a mountain. That doesn't sound very important to us, but 1300 years earlier, Moses climbed a mountain, and brought down the law of God (10 commandments).... Now Jesus, on the side of a mountain, brings to us the law of the kingdom. And the law of the kingdom is not, as some would suggest, a law in opposition

to the 10 commandments. The law of the kingdom is about the **attitudes** of the heart – getting them to line up with God’s law. It’s **not** about what we do. It’s about who we are. **Jeremiah 31:33 I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.** It’s about our character. It’s about what characterises the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And so Jesus sits down, as a Jewish teacher would, and he teaches. He teaches us the essence of the Kingdom of Heaven. And, as he does this, He gives us 8 verses of poetry, followed by a short conclusion. Sadly, we’ve lost the poetic feel to the beatitudes. The words in our bibles are translated correctly – not poetically. But when we look at our bibles, (in most modern translations), you can see that the text is indented. Have you ever noticed that? Did you know that, when they indent the text, it’s to show us that, in its original language, it’s poetry. And, so we know it’s poetry, and I can’t help but think that we miss out here. Can you imagine how beautiful these verses would be, presented as a poem.

*Blessed are those, with spirit poor;
For to them the heavenly kingdom be.*

*Blessed are those, with sorrow mourn;
For comfort shall their sorrow flee.*

Can you imagine that? (I’m sure Jesus did it better)
So, what does it all mean? This new law of the Kingdom?

Well, the first thing we need to realise is that this is about what we **are** – and not just about what we **do**. And this moves it out of the control of the human, and into the control of God. You see, you and I **cannot** control what we are..... To a greater, or lesser extent, we **can** control what

we do, but we cannot control what we **are**. And this teaching of Jesus shows us, how the human life – what we are – is transformed when we have a commitment to the King of Heavenⁱⁱⁱ.

When we have a commitment to The King, God changes things. He changes lives. He changes attitudes. Paul talks about it in terms of the fruit of the spirit growing in our lives. The very character of God becoming our character. And so, don't go reading these beatitudes as something you have to do in order to get into heaven. Understand them as attitudes of **heaven** that in Christ, we receive.

OK. Each of the beatitudes begins with the word “Blessed”, or “happy”. But we need to understand that it's not some kind of an emotional happiness. It's not a happiness that depends upon our mood of the day, or depends upon our outward circumstances. To be “blessed” is to be made happy by God. It's the spiritual joy of relationship with God. It means that ultimately, it will be well with the one who is blessed^{iv}. And there's sort of two elements to this blessing. There's the blessedness of the here and now, and there's the blessedness of the coming kingdom.

A young child had his first ride in a lift. And he later told his friends about it. “I got into this little room, and the upstairs came down.” And you know, that's what it's like being a Christian. We get into Christ, and heaven comes down, and glory fills our soul^v.

I don't know why we should ever see long faces in church. We come to church because we worship, with joy, the one

who has given us the Kingdom of Heaven. The Christian life isn't a life of drudgery. The Christian life is a life of joy. And some of us need to re-discover that joy. Blessed – happy are those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven. Sometimes, this joy is an absolute contradiction of the circumstances that we find ourselves in. And it's there regardless.

So why? Why are we so blessed? Why should we be so happy in Christ?

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

That sounds a bit contradictory, doesn't it?

But, notice how it says "poor in spirit" and not "spiritually poor". There's nothing blessed about having a weak prayer life. There's nothing blessed about leaving your bible up on the shelf for weeks on end. There's nothing blessed about a godless existence..... A life, devoid of God, is never a blessing.

To be poor in spirit means to come to the realisation that, apart from God, we're spiritually bankrupt. It's a broken and crushed spirit. A person who realises that spiritually, they are in absolute poverty, is at the first step of the Kingdom of Heaven. Until we come to the realisation that, without God we're nothing, God can do nothing with us.

And so, ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

There's not a lot to explain here. I hope you know as well as I do, the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us hope for eternity.

But let me give you a little bit of information about Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew was received and read by a church who suffered... - a church who mourned. Christians in the early church were persecuted. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were crucified. They were boiled in oil.... They had much to mourn.... And yet they were blessed, for they were comforted. They were comforted because they share the common hope that you and I share.

Our faith is in Jesus Christ who promises us a future beyond our current experience. Our faith is in Jesus Christ, who brings us eternal life. And therefore, blessed are those who mourn.

There is something very different about a Christian funeral. A Christian funeral is a celebration of the new life to come – it acknowledges our current sadness, but looks forward, with confidence, to the joy of the resurrection.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

^{v5} Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

This is actually a direct quote from Psalm 37. And when we know that it refers to Psalm 37, we have a better idea of what he means by “meek”. The meek are those who can hold their temper. Even in the face of evil and adversity, the meek do not lash out. Instead they put their hope in God. Psalm 37:⁷ Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. ⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret--it leads only to evil. ⁹ For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. ¹⁰ A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. ¹¹ But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.

Blessed are the meek.

The meek are those who put their faith in God – even when that doesn’t make sense. The world would say “*Blessed are the pushy because they get ahead in the world*” “Blessed are the go-getters”. “Blessed are those who make things happen for themselves”. “Blessed are those who stand up for themselves”. But Jesus turns this whole idea on its head and says “Blessed are the meek”. They mightn’t have the earth yet. But they will. They’ll inherit it.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

I’ve never known what it means to be hungry. I’ve gone without food for a week. I know what it means to have a

good appetite. But I don't know what it truly means to be hungry.

In the Antarctic summer of 1908, Sir Ernest Shackleton and three companions attempted to travel to the South Pole. They set off with four ponies to help carry the load. But weeks later, their ponies dead, rations all but exhausted, they turned back toward their base.

On the return journey, as Shackleton records, "The time was spent talking about food - elaborate feasts, gourmet delights, sumptuous menus... As they staggered along, not knowing whether they would survive, every waking hour was occupied with thoughts of eating.

*Jesus, fresh from his 40 day fast in the desert, said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. When we look at Shackleton's obsession with food, can we catch a glimpse of the passion that Jesus intends for **our** quest for righteousness.*

Now, most of us feel a desire for righteousness, when we've been badly done by ourselves. We want somebody to intervene and correct the wrong, when it's affected us.

But to hunger and thirst for righteousness, is to hunger and thirst for righteousness (full stop). It's a hunger for us to live righteously, and it's a thirst to see righteousness breaking in to this world, in every sphere of society.

^{v7} Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

The story is told of a mother who sought from Napoleon, the pardon of her son. The emperor said, that it was his second offence, and justice demanded his death.

“I don’t ask for justice,” said his mother. “I plead for mercy.”

“But he does not deserve mercy”.

“Sir,” cried the mother, “it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask.”

“Well then,” said the emperor, “I will show mercy”, and the son was saved.^{vi}

It’s not often we hear a good story about Napoleon, is it? The merciful are those who forgive, when forgiveness is not deserved. Later in this very same sermon, Jesus actually teaches us the Lord’s prayer. And as he concludes the lord’s prayer, he says Matthew 6:14-15 ¹⁴ For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. The Kingdom of Heaven is a merciful kingdom. Its king is merciful.... Its subjects are merciful. God has been so good to us. He has forgiven us so much. We, too must be forgiving. Blessed are the merciful.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

.... Do you want to see God? Well, it’s only those with a pure heart who will see Him.

This verse is the crux of the beatitudes. Your heart can only be made pure by **God**. I'm reminded of Psalm 51, where David prays ^{“10} **Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.** A pure heart is a creation. And there is only one creator. Before I knew Jesus Christ as my saviour, my heart was not pure. Before I experienced the mercies, and the saving grace of God, my heart was not pure. My heart was filthy. And if it is pure now, it is only because God has created it so.....

And you won't see God – you will not have any part in the Kingdom of Heaven, unless we repent and submit to Him, and allow Him to purify our hearts.

⁹ **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.**

..... Most people think of peace as ‘the absence of war’, or the absence of trouble. But the biblical concept of peace is much more than that. To wish somebody peace is to wish for them “good”, and not just the absence of evil.

And, it says “blessed are the peacemakers”. It doesn't say “blessed are the pacifists”, or “blessed are the peace lovers”, or “blessed are the peaceful”.... It says “blessed are the peacemakers.”

Sometimes, out of a desire for peace, we let troubles build and build, rather than confronting them. The peacemaker, however, takes an active role in bringing reconciliation.

They **work** to **build** peace. They don't just ignore a sore and let it fester.

Let your Heavenly Father make you into a peacemaker.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

I don't think Jesus would have made a very good salesman.... He was too honest. Some people believe, that when they become a Christian, all of the troubles of this life will just disappear. Well, give them time, and they'll be disappointed. *Jesus didn't promise a bed of roses. He promised a cross of nails.*

He didn't promise wealth. He didn't promise friends. He didn't promise us status in society. Far from it. He told us that we would suffer for our faith. He told us that we would be insulted. He told us that there would be all kinds of accusations thrown at us. Things that weren't even true would be said about us..... "People will **hate** you because of me."

Have you ever experienced that? ... I have. And probably more in the last 8 months than ever before in my life. With obedience to God, comes persecutions, ridicule, false accusations, distrust, character assassination....

And yet Jesus said, “When that happens to you, you’re blessed....”

Blessed???? How could we be blessed in persecution? We’re blessed because, we are not the first. We follow God’s prophets, and we follow his Son. They too were persecuted.

We’re blessed because, although there are troubles in this life, there is reward in the next.

We’re blessed because, although the body **can** be killed – it **will** be raised.

This, my friends, is the Christian faith. This is why Christians, throughout the ages, and right now, are prepared to die for what they believe... Are YOU?????

Are you someone who will **never** disown your Lord. Well, yours is the kingdom of heaven.

These are the beatitudes. The beautiful attitudes of the heart...

Are they pie in the sky? Can my heart really be like that? Can these attitudes really be **my** attitudes?.... Only by the grace of God they can.

Our God is in the business of **changing** lives, **and** changing attitudes. Our part, is to cease living for **this** world, and to set our hearts on the Kingdom of Heaven. Your part, is to realise that sometimes the Australian way is in conflict with the Kingdom way. And then allow God to have His way in

us. – that his attitudes would become our attitudes,.....,
because His kingdom has become our kingdom.

Question time????

- ⁱ Pawson David “sermon on the mount”
- ⁱⁱ Green, the message of Matthew (p.89)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Green, the message of Matthew (p.88-89)
- ^{iv} Keener – a commentary on the gospel of Matthew.
- ^v 1001 more humorous illustrations. (p.41-42)
- ^{vi} Green Michael 1500 illustrations – (p.240)