

SERMON TRANSCRIPT



Ormskirk Christian Fellowship
Sunday 04 November 2012

An Unwanted Blessing?

It was the final session, on the last morning of a two-week seminar about Greek culture, when a professor turned to his students and asked: "Does anybody have any questions?" Over the past two weeks it felt as though there had been enough questions to last a lifetime, and by now, the whole class were suffering from information overload. Still eager to teach them more the professor patiently waited, but was greeted by total silence. "Are there no questions at all?" He swept the room with his eyes. Then, from the very back row, there came one solitary voice: "Professor, what is the meaning of life?"

A ripple of laughter followed; people stirred restlessly ... most of them just wanted to go. The professor held up his hand, stilled the room and looked at the young man who'd just asked the question. He was trying, with his eyes, to work out whether it was serious or simply offered in jest. "I will answer your question," he said. With that, he reached into his pocket, took out a wallet, fished into the leather pouch, and brought out a very small round mirror, about the size of a 10p piece. Then he said something like this:

"When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found some broken pieces of a mirror. The wreckage of a German motorcycle had been found there. I tried to gather all the pieces and put them together, but it wasn't possible, so I kept only the largest piece; this one. By scratching it with a stone, after several hours, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine, into holes and crevices. It became a game for me, to get light into the most inaccessible places that I could find."

"I kept the little mirror, and as I've gone through life, I have taken it out during idle moments and continued to enjoy the challenge of that game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that it was not just a child's game, but also a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I have come to understand that I am not the light, nor the source of light. I am a fragment of a mirror whose full design and shape I do not know."

"Nevertheless, with what I do have, I can reflect light into dark places of this world, and into the hearts of men, thereby changing some things in some people. Perhaps others may see this and do likewise, although sometimes they will not. But this is what I am about. This is the meaning of life." Then he took his small mirror, and holding it carefully, caught the bright sunlight streaming through the window, and slowly reflected it onto each person in the room.

Now I realise that for some of you, a story like that might seem a very odd way to begin this third and final sermon on the beatitudes ... but it's always been God's purpose, from the moment that we became Christians, that His light would shine through us ... that He would be visible in our attitudes and behaviour. The beatitudes are like a mirror reflecting the light of God. In the dark world in which we live ... the beatitudes are all about God shining through. They're supposed to "be" our "attitude" to everyone around us ... but how clearly do people see God shining through me ... or you ... or us?

The passage I've been asked to speak on this morning is Matthew 5 v 9-12, so let's read that:

- ⁹ **Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.**
- 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.**
- ¹² **Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

I want you to notice something about the last two verses – look at how many times the word “you” gets used. Up until this point, Jesus has been speaking about “THEY” and “THEIRS”. “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.” Now from verse eleven, He starts talking about “YOU” and “YOURS”. Jesus is getting personal. I think what these final beatitudes tell us - if we’re true followers of Christ – is that persecution is going to come – not just in general, but individually, to each one of us. Therefore, we need to be prepared. But how do we do that, and in this year when we’re focussing on worship, where do these beatitudes fit in anyway?

Well ... worship is about far more than music and songs. Worship is the conscious, deliberate act of putting God above everything else. It’s about giving him the place of honour in our lives and putting him first. The purest kind of worship is to live a faithful life ... to be a follower of Christ, faithful to the call that Jesus makes upon each of us. **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** wrote Paul (Romans 3:23), and he was right. Why? Because none of us have lived a truly faithful life. None of us have even come close to the mark. So how do we become more faithful? How do we become more blessed? I want to look at five things:

1. Faithful Christians are faithful in their TRIALS

Simon Peter is one of my heroes in the Bible. Not because he always did what was right. Not because he was always faithful. Not for any reason in fact, except that everything he did - he did with boldness. Actually, his boldness often got him into trouble, and in his boldness, he made some glaring mistakes. He denied Jesus three times in fact, but every time he fell down – Jesus would pick him back up, dust him off and forgive him. I like that.

You see God is always faithful, even in our unfaithfulness. Faithfulness is a godly characteristic and because faithfulness is a characteristic of God, being faithful is being Godly. He mightn’t always have showed it, but Peter knew that. He writes in one of his letters and says:

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” 1 Peter 4:12-14

When trials come – and they will – we need to remain faithful too. How can you ever know if you’re being faithful, unless you’re tempted by unfaithfulness? “Fiery ordeals” are a test of your faithfulness. Do you see that? It’s in those times of testing when the chaff is separated from the grain. It’s in those times of testing - when things are really heating up - that metal gets refined. It’s in those times of testing that faithfulness is proved and faith is exercised. We are tested by the trials of this world. Don’t be surprised by them; they’re bound to happen – instead, rejoice that God is getting you ready for even greater things. We must strive to remain faithful in our trials - because faithful Christians remain faithful to Christ.

2. Faithful Christians are faithful in their TESTIMONY

Let’s look at another verse from 1 Peter, this time from chapter three:

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” 1 Peter 3:15

One day a lady criticized D. L. Moody for the way he evangelised and attempted to win people to Christ. Moody said to her “I agree with you. I don’t like the way I do it either. Tell me, how do you do it?” The lady replied, “I don’t do it.” Moody answered, “Then I like my way of doing it, better than your way of not doing it.”

Jesus said: **"Whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven."** Matthew 10:33 If you're a Christian - you are instructed to tell others about Christ. Peter said we should be ready to speak up and do it with courtesy. Faithful Christians are faithful in their testimony – they tell others what Christ has done in their lives.

3. Faithful Christians are faithful with their TREASURE

Look at what Jesus says about treasures:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus goes on to say later in this chapter:

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." Matthew 6:24

Friends, it's a fact: God's people support God's work. The only way in the Bible that I see God's work being carried out in this world, is when God's people support it. Faithful Christians are faithful with their treasures. They are faithful with their money. I don't know about you - but I want to support something that will make a difference in eternity ... something that's going to last forever. The church will last forever - the gates of hell will not tear it down. The church was placed in this world to carry out God's work - and we need to support it with our time and with our treasure. Faithful Christians are faithful with their treasure.

4. Faithful Christians are faithful with their TALENTS

A little boy once asked his father this question: "Dad, if three frogs were sitting on a tree branch that overhangs a pond, and one frog decided to jump off into the pond, how many frogs would be left?" "Two" said his dad. "No," the boy replied. "I'll ask you again. If three frogs were sitting on a tree branch that overhangs a pond, and one frog decided to jump off into the pond, how many frogs would be left?" "Oh, I get it," said his dad "If one decided to jump, the others would jump too. So there would be none left, right?" "No dad, that's not right either," said the boy. "The answer is three frogs. The first frog only DECIDED to jump – he never actually did it."

Have you ever decided to do something and never actually done it? Have you ever been given a present and never actually used it? God has given you talents, abilities and spiritual gifts – but have you ever used them to help others? God didn't give you those talents, abilities and spiritual gifts to keep in the cupboard or just use to make a living. He gave you those things so that you could help people around you. Look at what The Bible says about spiritual gifts:

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." 1 Corinthians 12:7 In other words the gifts you've been given are for the good of all. The whole church is supposed to benefit from the spiritual gifts that God gives you. We're to look out for each other – care for one another – help each other. We're to be our brother's keeper. We're to love one another. Faithful Christians are faithful with their abilities. Faithful Christians are faithful with their talents. Faithful Christians are faithful with the spiritual gifts that God has chosen to give them.

5. Faithful Christians are faithful with their TIME

Friends, all of us have a limited amount of time. I hope this won't come as a shock to anyone, but we don't know the moment that God will take us home. We don't know how long we have

left in this world. The Bible says: **"The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass."** Isaiah 40:7

Jesus put it another way: **"Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come."** Mark 13:33 All of us have a limited amount of time in this life. Faithful Christians know that their time on earth is limited. Jesus knew that too – didn't He? He knew that His time was limited and that He needed to be found faithful – faithful to the very end. Remember that verse from Philippians? **"Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!"** Philippians 2:8

Jesus stayed faithful – and His faithfulness translated into obedience. I'm so glad that Jesus was faithful, aren't you? Faithfulness really matters. Jesus' faithfulness revealed His character ... and guess what? Your faithfulness reveals your character too.

God does not require you to be brilliant.
God does not require you to be clever.
God does not require you to be articulate.
God does not require you to be innovative.
God does not require you to be charming.
God does not require you to be handsome (men) or beautiful (ladies).
But He does require you to be faithful.

I don't want to upset anybody, but friends, I don't think we need to spend our time worrying about whether we're poor in spirit, meek, or merciful. I think our focus needs to be on walking in the Spirit and being submissive to God, because if the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives, He will be manifesting all of these things in us anyway. **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** – that's what Jesus said (Matthew 6:33).

The happiest people in the world are those who yield themselves to God and experience His grace every day. Why? Because theirs is the kingdom of heaven - they are the ones who get comforted, they inherit the earth, they are filled, they obtain mercy, they're the ones who see God, and other people see God in them. They lead the most fulfilling lives because God makes them into a complete person, a whole person ... even when they face times of trouble.

A little boy was asked by his teacher, "What is a saint?" He replied, "A saint is a person who makes the light shine through." He came to this conclusion not by listening to my sermon, but because he'd seen sunshine flooding through some Old Testament characters depicted in the stained-glass windows of a large cathedral that he'd visited on a school trip. It was an easy mistake to make, but actually, he wasn't far wrong. You see a saint, a true worshipper of God, a person who is faithful and pure in heart, lets the light of God shine through.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
Matthew 5:11-12

As I'm coming in to land, I'd like you to do something. Mentally, just like the professor I told you about at the start of this message; I'd like you to reach into your pocket or purse and imagine taking out a small mirror. Have you done that? Now, I'd like you to look into it.

Are you allowing God to so control and fill your life that He shines through? We know what that should look like from the description here in the beatitudes. Is that what you see? If it's not, why don't you take a step towards changing that and yield more of yourself to Jesus ... let the Holy Spirit transform you ... let a beatitude life encompass you ... and make you whole?

In this, a year of worship, what better way could any of us worship Him?