

Sharing Christ's Experience

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Date: 21 February 2016

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading. You'll find it there in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5. And we're back into this study on the Sermon on the Mount that we started just a few weeks ago.

Matthew, chapter 5. If you have one of the Blue Church Bibles, you'll find that, I think, on page 810. And again, we're reading this passage at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

We call them the Beatitudes. And Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1 to 12, where Jesus is teaching his disciples, those he has already called to follow him. We read that in chapter 4, verses 18, and following how he called these brothers, Simon and Andrew, to follow me.

And then he went all throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and affliction from among the people.

And here Jesus is, teaching the Gospel of his Kingdom to those who are gathered around to follow him. So Matthew 5, verse 1. And seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he had 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.

[1 : 31] 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. And blessed are you, when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Amen. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage we read there in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, page 810 in our church Bibles.

[2 : 50] And after a week off, we're back again to basics. Maybe you're feeling a little insulted by all of this back to the ABC of Christian discipleship.

Perhaps you're feeling you're way beyond that stage now. You've been a Christian for many years. But let me say this. As every great one really knows, the real secret of greatness in any sphere is that you're never going to make any progress unless you keep going back, back, back to where it all began and back to remembering what it's all really about.

A friend of mine just the other week sent me a book. I haven't quite worked out why he sent me this book yet, but anyway, he has. And it's called Built to Last, The Successful Habits of Visionary Companies.

There's by a man called Jim Collins. Some of you will have heard of him and read one of his other books, Good to Great. It's been one of the most successful business books, I think, of all time. But anyway, I was wondering why I'd been sent this book and reading the first couple of pages.

I'm still trying to work it out. But I was struck what was said on the very first page about the title. The author says this. In some ways, it's the wrong title.

[4 : 08] Because this book is not fundamentally about building to last. It's about building something that is worthy of lasting. About building a company of such intrinsic excellence that the world would lose something important if that organization ceased to exist.

I found that rather striking. It's about building something worthy of lasting. Well, how much more ought that to apply to the company of believers that the Lord Jesus Christ is building?

He is building something worthy of lasting for all eternity. And so I think we need to listen, don't we, to the founder of this great company telling us all about the intrinsic excellence of what it is that he is doing.

And we need to grasp the picture and the plan that he is laying out for Christian discipleship that is worthy of lasting. Not only through this life, but through all eternity.

So we're going back again to look at the marks of Christ's people and to this portrait of true Christianity according to the Lord Jesus that he is painting for us here right in the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in these Beatitudes.

[5 : 28] And we've seen already that in many ways this portrait that Jesus is painting for us is a very shocking one. And I don't mean shocking as in some of the modern art that we get today, you know, where you pay 50 million pounds for an upside down dead sheep in a tank of formalin, that sort of thing.

Some people really do have more money than sense, don't they? But it is nevertheless a kind of upside down portrait that Jesus is painting for us here. Because as we've seen, the way up in Jesus' kingdom is the way down.

And it's the way down into the dust. It's the way into humility. It's the way even of death. And that's how Jesus talks. It's a cross-shaped portrait, if you like, of life that Jesus paints for us here and paints for us all through the Gospels.

And that's why the dark shadow of the cross looms over Jesus' life, even from his birth, even from the very beginning of the Gospels. Go back and read Matthew chapter 2 and you'll see so clearly. That's why Rembrandt's famous painting of the Adoration of the Shepherds has that shadow of the cross looming over the scene, even there in the stable from the very beginning. And Jesus makes it plain right from the start of his ministry that the shadow of the cross will also shape the life of every true Christian disciple, of everyone who follows him.

[7 : 03] Take up your cross and follow me, he says. Lose your life for my sake and that's how you'll find it. Listen to the words in Matthew chapter 16.

You might like to look them up, where he's talking about the shape of Christian discipleship.

Matthew 16 verse 21, we're told, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

But then he goes right on, doesn't he, to describe the disciples' life. Verse 24. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. That is the true shape of Christian discipleship, according to the Lord Jesus.

Now that is very different, isn't it, from what we sometimes hear evangelists and preachers talking about today. When they want people to come to Jesus and find health and healing and wealth and prosperity and fulfillment and all of these things.

[8 : 23] But the shape of the cross is always there in Jesus' teaching and it's right here in these beatitudes as we've already been seeing. And we've seen that there's a wonderful simplicity and indeed there's a wonderful progression in these beatitudes as you follow them through.

Just look back at them again in chapter 5 there. These first four beatitudes, they describe really the way into the kingdom of heaven. And what they're describing is that pattern of the cross applied to someone's experience.

To crush and to destroy all sense of self-righteousness. It's a death, isn't it, to everything that this world esteems and approves. And it's a death indeed to all of our own self-esteem.

When we are crushed, when we are empty, then we are submitting, well, just to the approval of God and not this world.

We find then something that He alone can give. His declaration of blessing that can't be found any other way in this world. So verse 3, you see, it's not the spiritually rich who accomplish being blessed.

[9 : 37] But it's the poor, the bankrupt, it's those who have nothing to offer to God and who know that. And it's not, verse 4, the happy and the carefree, but it's those who mourn.

It's those who know the reality of their own sin and who weep because of it. And it's not the mighty in this world's eyes, verse 5.

It's not the self-assertive who can force their way into the kingdom of God. No, it's the meek. It's those who are humbled before God and who have buried all their pretensions, who have bowed to the sheer grace of God in Christ.

Verse 6, it's not those who are satisfied with their own pedigree, with their own righteousness. No, it's those who realize their emptiness and who hunger and who thirst for God to fill them with his righteousness.

That's the way into the kingdom of heaven, says Jesus, and that's the only way. It's the way of finding God's grace through Jesus Christ, his Son.

[10:42] Of course, that simply baffles the world because it's the very opposite, isn't it, of the way the world thinks and acts and lives. Just look at the language that we use so often in our own world.

We talk about climbing up the ladder, don't we? Whether it's a career ladder or the property ladder or whatever it is. We talk about moving up in the organization. We talk about rising up in the rankings, in the league tables, whether it's schools or hospitals or whatever it is.

Everything has a league table nowadays. But here with Jesus, you see, the way in and the way on is the way down. That's so foreign to our thinking.

Think of the English Premier League. I don't know if you follow the football, but if you do, this year's story is Jamie Vardy, isn't it? Leicester City. It's absolutely extraordinary. But it's going to take a monumental effort, isn't it, for Leicester City to remain on top.

They've got to keep scoring goals. They've got to keep staying up. They cannot afford to slip down. Otherwise, Arsenal or Chelsea or whoever will just beat them to the top.

[11:52] But you see, in Jesus' kingdom, in the everlasting kingdom of heaven, it's only those who have gone down, who have been to rock bottom, who can find the way in.

The doorway of grace has that very, very low lintel. And you have to stoop to enter. You have to leave all your pride behind. And the way on, you see, in this kingdom of Jesus is just more of the same.

And that, too, is utterly baffling to our world. Look at the second half of the Beatitudes, verses 7 to 10. You see, they're simply speaking, aren't they, about living out the reality of that grace that we've found and which has come to us totally from outside of us altogether as a gift of God's blessing. But you see, God's blessing, God's grace can't come into our lives without becoming part of our lives truly. And so these things that are described in these verses here are simply the badges of membership of Christ's kingdom, proving that what has been hidden in our hearts is really real. Because, as we said last time, finding God's grace will inevitably mean living God's mercy. Their real disciple, verse 7, a kingdom person is merciful.

[13:13] Well, they must be because they, of all people, prize mercy. They love mercy because they've received mercy from God. And therefore, they'll love their neighbors themselves.

Which is just the other side of loving God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. Which is just what verse 6 is saying. because to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to hunger and thirst for God himself, the righteous one.

And the real disciple, verse 8, you see, is pure in heart. That is, they're transparent, they're honest, they're sincere before the world of men and women. And that's the outward mark of meekness because the real disciple has buried all pretensions.

The real disciple has faced God with honesty and sincerity and truth about themselves. And therefore, they're liberated to be transparent and sincere before all the world.

You see, when you know that God has seen through you and seen through all the spin and the deception and the pretense, when he has seen to the real you, well, you don't need to hide any longer, do you, the real you from anybody else?

[14:28] You're liberated. And the real disciple, verse 9, you see, is a peacemaker because he knows what it means to be at peace with God. And therefore, he's a true son of God.

He shares the characteristic of his heavenly Father. And so, he loves to bring peace to the broken and ruptured relationships of this world. There's a correspondence there again, I think, to the second beatitude in verse 4 because mourning for sin means that you want to deal with the awful consequences of sin wherever you see that in the world and to bring peace.

You're simply living out the grace of God that has flooded into your life as the mercy of God and the peace of God floods out of your life.

But then look at verse 10, this last beatitude. Because there seems to be a real paradox there, don't you think? Real disciples, those who are merciful, those who are pure in heart, those who are peacemakers, are persecuted.

Peacemakers find themselves at war, according to Jesus. Well, that can't be right, can it? That must be a mistake. Surely that's not something that does fit into this portrait.

[15 : 53] There's been a word in the wrong place here. It's like a blot, isn't it? It's like a bit of paint that's got on the canvas off the palette in the wrong place and needs to be scraped off because it's spoiling the picture.

Peacemakers being persecuted. Well, a lot of preachers today, a lot of churches today want to wipe that blot off the canvas, don't they? Surely if the church truly did live like this, as Jesus is saying, with the character described here in verses 7 to 9, surely it would be like heaven.

Surely it would be peace on earth all around, Christ's people. Surely these people would be fettered and loved by the world. No, says Jesus.

Live like that and it will mean persecution on earth. It will mean conflict all around his people.

Because, you see, although the kingdom of God has come in Jesus' coming and it is yours now when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, nevertheless, there is a not yet also about Jesus' kingdom.

Look again at verse 3 and verse 10. Look at the first and the last beatitudes here. I wonder if you notice that these two beatitudes are in the present tense, aren't they?

[17 : 20] Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. But in between, in verses 4 to 9, all the rest of them are in the future tense. Do you see that? They shall be comforted and so on.

You see, there is a now, there is a present tense reality and there is also a not yet, a future. All the blessings of Christ's kingdom, although they're real already, will only be complete and fulfilled in the future.

only when Christ's kingdom is consummated, only when the Lord Jesus comes again to fully establish his kingdom, to usher in the new heavens and the earth forever.

Only then will there be an end to all mourning. Only then will we fully inherit the earth. Only then will there be a full and complete satisfying of all of our longings, all of our hunger and thirst for righteousness and so on.

Only then will we see him. Only then will we at last rejoice physically present in the Father's house. But until then, Jesus won't allow us any romantic naivety.

[18 : 44] He's quite clear, he's quite open. Look at verse 10. People who hunger and thirst, who love righteousness, who love God's kingdom and all his ways, will be persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Why? Well, as Jesus puts it rather starkly in John's Gospel, chapter 15, he says, if the world hates you, it hated me first.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. It's because, you see, to be a real Christian, to be a real follower of Jesus is not just to find his grace and not just to live his mercy, but it is also to share Christ's experience.

Jesus is very straight. There's no spin, there's no soft sell, there's no hiding it away in the small print. No, there is a paradox that is at the very heart of all true Christian discipleship.

The true disciple is blessed. There is great rejoicing even now, not just in the future. But at the same time, Jesus says, the real disciple will have scars.

[20 : 00] You will be reviled on my account, says the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to notice again the symmetry of these beatitudes.

You see, the eighth one takes us right back to the first. Both are in the present tense. It's very deliberate. It's definitive. There is now the kingdom of heaven.

And indeed, what Jesus is saying is that this last one, in a way, is evidence of the first. The truly poor in spirit who has been humbled by God, they are truly blessed now even if they are humiliated by the reviling and the persecution of men.

How can that be? That really does sound upside down, doesn't it? The world laughs at that kind of thinking. Who wants to be reviled?

Who wants to be slandered? Who wants to be persecuted? It can be few things as stressful in life as false and slanderous accusations.

[21 : 03] Perhaps when you were young, you were taught that nursery rhyme, sticks and stones can break my bones but names can never harm me. Friends, it's not true, is it? It's not true. Tell that

to the teacher who's been suspended on false allegations of maliciously abusing a pupil.

Tell it to the person who's been accused falsely of rape or sexual assault or something or child abuse 30 years ago in the past. People will seldom ever recover from those allegations, will they? Even if months and years later a court of law totally exonerates them, it's too late. So often their lives are broken, their families are broken, their whole future is in tatters.

And yet Jesus says to his disciples and to his true followers, those who are committed to him and to his kingdom, that this will be the road that we must walk.

But he also says that in that path, even now, not just in the future, but in that path, lies the way of blessing now.

[22 : 17] The way of real Christian discipleship means that we will be both reviled and rejoicing at the same time, now, in this world.

Because that's what it means to be united to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We share truly in Christ's experience.

Let's think about those two words which dominate verses 11 and 12, reviled and rejoicing. Blessed are you when others revile you on my account.

Jesus is absolutely open about the scars of real discipleship. In fact, it's so important that this last message in verse 10, he takes, you see in verse 11 and 12, he expands it and he applies it personally to his disciples in front of him.

Do you see how he speaks about them all the way through? And now, in verse 11, he turns and says, blessed are you, you followers of me, and you must grasp this above everything else.

[23 : 22] You see, Jesus is a preacher. He's not lecturing to these people about a theory. He's not just giving them some sort of interesting abstract ideas for them to ponder and throw around and chat about over coffee.

No, he is proclaiming to them personal truth. He's giving them a word that's to be received, that's to be digested, that's to be learned and lived out in real life.

And that's why we're all here this morning too, isn't it? Not just to hear some ideas to be interested in and talked about, not to just hear about an explanation of Jesus' words, but to have an encounter with Jesus, the Lord of glory himself, who is speaking to us as he spoke to them.

He's proclaiming personal truth to each one of us this morning who wants to be a follower of Jesus. And he's telling us, he's telling you, people of my kingdom will have scars.

You can't share in my blessing, says Jesus, without sharing in my scars. Because the world hates Christ and no disciple is ever greater than their master.

[24 : 37] If the world hated him, it will hate us also. And friends, if you're a follower of Jesus today, you need to know that. You need to know that.

Discipleship, if it is real Christian discipleship of the real Jesus, discipleship is cross-shaped. And there will be the marks of the cross upon your life if you follow him.

You cannot have the blessings of God's grace without the implications of his grace in your life. because our world can't stand the gospel of grace.

Grace is so utterly destructive to this world's cherished values. It hates it. See, the world says, blessed are the achievers, blessed are the self-fulfilled, blessed are the attractive, blessed are the assertive, the powerful, those who satisfy themselves, blessed are the manipulators, the clever wheeler dealers, the expedient.

But Christ's grace is the great humbler, the great leveler. It denies all of that and says no to that. And so therefore, it wounds to the very heart all the pride of this world that we live in.

[25 : 55] And therefore, the world will never accept a wounding message like that. And it will hate all of those who proclaim it and live it. And it will hate those who rejoice in a message of grace.

And Jesus says to us, you need to know that. You need to understand that. But you also need to know, verse 11, when you are reviled, when you're persecuted, when you're slandered for Jesus' sake, you also need to know that you are blessed.

Because these scars, according to Jesus, are the very evidence that you are a beloved disciple. Not that you're a failed disciple. not that you're someone who's made a great mistake.

And that's why this is happening to you. Of course, he is talking about reviling on Jesus' account, not on your own deserving. He is talking about false accusations, not true allegations about your bad behavior.

Jesus is not excusing Christians here from being rude and obnoxious people. Of course not. But when it is for the sake of Christ and his gospel that we suffer, well, as John Stoltz says, being despised and rejected, slandered and persecuted is as much a normal mark of Christian discipleship as being pure in heart and merciful.

[27 : 19] You see, that scars are just as much a mark of the grace of God at work in your life as poverty of spirit, as a merciful outlook is.

And both of these things and all of these things are essential for those who truly follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Scars for Jesus are just another outward and tangible and visible sign of a heart that is inwardly transformed by the grace of God in Christ.

A heart that is changed so as to transform your whole future. If you'll allow me another illustration from the cardiac clinic, it's like a patient that you see coming in to see you and last time you saw him he was puffing and panting and struggling along and barely able to walk but this time he barges into your room red face looking healthy tells you he's walked two miles to the clinic instead of getting a taxi to the door light last time and he hasn't had a pain in his chest for months.

What's happened? Well, you get him to take his shirt off and put him up on the couch and then you see a great big ugly scar all the way down the middle of his chest and you give it a poke.

You always do that. And it's tender and sore and it looks really savage and nasty but you see that scar is what explains the total transformation that's taken place in that person's life from invalid to fighting fitness.

[28 : 58] What's happened? It tells you his whole heart has been revascularized by coronary artery bypass surgery. That's what it tells you and that telltale scar is the inevitable consequence of that heart rescue operation.

And so it is, you see, with the heart rescue mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be scars. There must be scars because it can't be any other way.

For your heart to become mine, says Jesus, I have to get in there and possess that heart. You have to be transfused with the life that only I can give you.

But that means that my life must become a real part of your life. And your life will become so closely identified with mine that the attitude of the world to me will become the attitude of the world to you.

The disciple is like his teacher, says Jesus, the servant like his master. And if they call the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household?

[30 : 16] So you see, if we are true disciples of the real Jesus Christ, we will share the experience of Christ. And there will be reviling, there will be persecution, there will be all kinds of slander and false accusation against us on his account from the world.

There will be the scars from the new atheist types like Richard Dawkins who think that we are utterly deluded. There will be the violence from the Muslim extremists who love to kill Christians in Pakistan and in northern Nigeria and in the Aizal territories and in other places, even our western cities today.

And there will be the revulsion even of friends and family, won't there? Perhaps lovers who hate that our commitment to Christ means that we can't join them in the lifestyle that they've chosen and want us to choose to live along with them, but we can't.

They'll hate us. The world hated Jesus and his ways. And if his life is in you, my friend, the world will hate you and the ways of Jesus in your life, as will the religious establishment, just as it did in Jesus' day.

Those who loved their institutions, their temples, their priesthood, their traditions. But they hated the real Jesus. They hated his words that challenged everything that they held so dearly.

[31 : 52] They hated him because they were spiritually bankrupt and dead. And so it is still today. If we are true disciples of the real Lord Jesus Christ, we will share the experience of Christ.

And friends, that means that there will be scars for us. Scars for you. Scars for all who will follow the real Jesus. And just as it is, if we are not living Christ's mercy, we need to question whether we have really grasped the gospel, whether we really have ourselves find God's grace in Christ.

So also, surely Jesus means that if there is no reviling, we must also question whether our faith is true faith at all. Because as Paul wrote plainly to the church in Philippi, it is being granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Amy Carmichael, the great missionary of Donavur in India, knew that, didn't she?

And she expressed it so eloquently in the poem that many of you will know, Hast I no scar? She imagines Jesus talking to somebody who claims to be his follower, and indeed who is someone with a great reputation as a follower of Christ.

[33 : 31] And the Lord says, Hast I no scar? No hidden scar on foot or side or hand? I hear these sung as mighty in the land, I hear they hail thy bright ascendant star.

Hast I no scar? Hast I no wound? Yet I was wounded by the archer spent, leaned me against the tree to die and rent by ravaging beasts that compassed me, I swooned.

Hast thou no wound? No wound? No scar? Yet as the master shall the servant be, and pierced are the feet that follow me, but thine are whole.

Can he have followed far who has no wound or scar? To have no scars, no wounds from reviling or persecution or slander that's always part of a discipleship, according to Jesus, that ought to be a cause for real soul-searching in us.

because according to Jesus, if we're not sharing his experience, although we might prophesy in his name and cast out demons in his name and do mighty works in his name, the likelihood is we don't really know him at all.

[34 : 59] And he doesn't know us. If that's true, he'll have to say, won't he, on the last day as he says a little further on in Matthew chapter 7, I never knew you.

Not really, not at all. And that, you see, is why scars and wounds from all that we may face in our walk with Jesus, that's why they are a cause for rejoicing.

Don't forget that second word, we are reviled but we are also, even now, in the midst of these things, says Jesus in verse 12, we are rejoicing. We can rejoice and be glad, he says.

Why? Because in sharing Christ's experience, look at verse 12, he tells us in sharing his experience we are confirmed in our part in his great unfolding story of salvation forever.

We are not out of step but we are in step with his marvelous purpose of grace. We are not abnormal. We are not struggling and scarred because we are failures, because we are abandoned by God, because we are no useless Christians, but because he is at work in us and through us.

[36 : 16] That's why we rejoice. Rejoice, he says, because we stand four square with all the true faithful ones of the past, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

And rejoice, says Jesus, because we stand four square in the company of those to whom belong the inheritance of the future. Look, your reward is great in heaven.

And that is the wonderful, wonderful message of grace and glory that wounds and scars for the sake of Christ serve to tell us.

Even when we're stung by the present pain that these things bring. It's just like for the heart bypass patient. every twinge in that scar in your chest reminds you of the wonderful, reassuring fact that your heart has got the blood flowing in it again and that you're not going to collapse with pain and breathlessness.

But you can stride out and walk and get on the golf course and do all the things you used to do. And friends, you see, that's why being reviled for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ should make us rejoice.

[37 : 35] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Rejoice and be glad now when all these things happen.

When your friends at school make fun of you and they call you names, they call you a Bible basher, they call you part of the God squad, and they beat you because you stand for Jesus, because you go to the scripture union at school, because you won't do some of the things that they do, and won't say some of the things they say.

Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. Rejoice, because Jesus knows, and he knows that you are the genuine article, that you are the real, true disciple.

Rejoice and be glad when your family might resent your newfound Christian faith, and quite falsely accuse you of all kinds of things, and say, oh, you're neglecting your duties, the family, you're neglecting all the things you should be doing, because you give yourself so much to that church, and to all of that.

Rejoice and be glad. Rejoice and be glad when people that you've loved scorn and hate you, because you can't remain any longer in a relationship with them, because you know it's wrong, and you know it's a relationship that grieves the Lord Jesus Christ, and you've chosen him over them.

[38 : 58] rejoice and be glad in the pain and heart-rending scar of that moment. Rejoice and be glad even when you're hurt badly by colleagues, by friends, even by family, when they say things to you and do things to you that are painful because of your commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, or because of your commitment to him, you do lose out tangibly in earthly things, in the job that you might have had, the career you might have progressed, the spouse you may have had, if you hadn't committed to give all in your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and had lived the way that you could have lived, under your own steam, under your own rule.

Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. And all these things, all these things that bring scars, these are the things that have marked out the real believer, the people of faith, from the very beginning all the way through.

You see how in a sense this last beatitude in verse 10 and its expansion and its application here in verses 11 and 12, it's the real test, isn't it? It's the litmus test of all the other beatitudes.

It's the test in a way of whether you really grasp the truth of the gospel, of the revolutionary kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and what it means to be a disciple of his. Because if you really are still focused on this world, the here and now, on material things, on peace, on prosperity, on fulfillment, then all of that sounds like utter, utter madness.

You can't possibly rejoice in persecution and slander and reviling. That is masochism, that is madness. You see, friend, if that's how you think, you still have not really grasped at all the truth about this kingdom Jesus is speaking about.

[41 : 04] And if that's so, it's very unlikely, actually, you can really stomach any of the rest of these beatitudes either, if you're really honest. You might have previously thought these were wonderful sayings, but not any longer, because to be truly humbled by grace, which is what all of these beatitudes are about, to be truly humbled in that way costs everything in this world.

And many, just like the rich young ruler, find that cost too great, and tremble, and back off, and walk away. But maybe over these last few weeks, you have grasped Jesus' teaching.

Perhaps you've been like one of those looking in the crowd as Jesus taught his disciples here, and you've been listening, and maybe you've heard Jesus speak, and you've realized that he is what you want, that you want that real righteousness, that yes, you are willing even to suffer for him, because you're so thirst for him, and you want him more than anything else.

But then you read these beatitudes about those who are blessed, and you say, but that just isn't me. I am proud. I haven't mourned for my sin nearly enough.

I'm not meek. I'm not pure. I'm just not worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ, although I want him. Well, that just brings us right back to verse three, where we began, doesn't it?

[42 : 40] It's the only place you can begin. And if that's how you feel, then you're just in the place you need to be to receive God's blessing in Christ. You're in the only place that you can receive God's blessing in Christ, knowing that you are poor in spirit.

But blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And so that kingdom can be yours, and it will be yours, if you come to Jesus with that attitude of heart, if you receive from him what you can't possibly ever offer to him.

There will be scars, there will be reviling and persecution and all kinds of evil falsely against you on Jesus' account.

Not one of us, friends, can change that. But Jesus says also there will be reward, great reward in heaven, because the Lord Jesus has loved you and he has overcome this world.

And he says there will be even now in the midst of that pain, there will be great rejoicing and great gladness of heart for all who share Christ's experience.

[44 : 05] They will share increasingly in the blessing and the joy of his everlasting kingdom of mercy. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Let's pray. Our heavenly Father, how we marvel at your kingdom which so turns our world upside down, but how we rejoice in your grace, that so turns our lives upside down, that you can make us rejoice even in scars incurred for the sake of your son, because they remind us and they proclaim to us that we truly belong, that we have your marks upon us, that we therefore have your arms around us.

So help us, we pray, to rejoice and be glad when others revile us and persecute us, and even utter all kinds of evil against us falsely on your account.

Help us to rejoice, because we know that so it has always been for the people of yours, and because we know that great is our reward in heaven with Jesus, our master and our friend. So in his name, we commit ourselves to you. Amen.